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JANE AUSTEN

BY

O. W. FIRKINS

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TO JANE AUSTEN

O THOU who to romance's sleights
Didst come as dawn to elves and sprites,
Replacing spectre-haunted nights
With daylight's genial reign;
Shrewd exorcist—who couldst so well
Romance's goblin bands expel,
Yet keep thine own unrivalled spell,
Incomparable Jane!

How doth thy bodkin's slender steel
Men's frailties and faults reveal!
To thee Achilles is all heel,
Thou lash of Folly's train!
Thou scourgest tomboy, cynic, grig,
The man whose diction is all wig,
The snob, the autocrat, the prig,
Inimitable Jane!

Thou seekest truth, and when 'tis found
Thou dost its sportive whims confound;
The shafts, the stables, and the pound
Shall now its pranks restrain;
It dreads thy logic's bristling fence,
Thy files of serried evidence,
Thy panoplied, embattled sense,
Irrefragable Jane!

I know thy passion's cautious throes,
Its timed and tactful overflows,
Its firmly regulated glows,
Its exemplary pain;

Oh, if a tense could court a mood,
Or axioms propositions wooed,
Their raptures were not more subdued,
Inestimable Jane!

O little world so trim and flat,
Where Fate must straighten his cravat,
And Death himself must use the mat,
Ere they could entrance gain!
Thine earth a box of mignonette,
A bird-cage in a window set,
A shelved and shapely cabinet,
Inviolable Jane!

O eye of eagle and of mole,
Thou shrewd and penetrating soul,
Yet off thy little English knoll
So impotent and vain;
Satiric—yet beneath thy glee
An orgy of propriety,
Thou riotest in decency,
Invulnerable Jane!

Was e'er a keen, satiric bent
So quaintly, comically blent
With smug and purring self-content,
And homiletic strain?
A Puck in cassock or a nun
In motley—art thou both or one?
O frolic lore, O surpliced fun,
Inexplicable Jane!

What pen could draw thee, line by line,
With art ironic and benign,
And truth unflawed; what pen but thine
O woman sage and sane?

I would this gladdened world might see
Another Jane to laugh at thee,
Rare target for rare archery,
    Irrevocable Jane!

Lightly through time thy figure trips,
Skirt lifted where the highway dips,
Thy brow now crinkled, now thy lips,
    As mirth rules or disdain:
The barred and bolted centuries
Thou frontest with unerring keys,
The *Park*, the *Abbey*, *Emma*—these
    Shall swift admission gain:
And if the porter claim a fee,
Fling *Pride* or *Sensibility:*
The flattered door shall ope for thee,
    Imperishable Jane!

PART I

THE NOVELIST

JANE AUSTEN

CHAPTER I

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

*Sense and Sensibility** belongs to a very old type of story—the story of brotherly (or sisterly) contrast. In Hebrew narrative it is as ancient as Cain and Abel, and receives the countenance of Jesus himself in the parable of the Prodigal Son and his brother. In

* The dating of Miss Austen's novels is not altogether precise, but it seems generally agreed that *Sense and Sensibility* represents an earlier formation, if not an earlier date, than *Pride and Prejudice*. A review of this novel is therefore the natural introduction to a survey of her work. At the outset, however, I shall gratefully avail myself of the succinct and useful summary in which Mr. R. Brimley Johnson has snooded up, if I may risk the word, the dishevelment of priorities in which the composition and publication of Miss Austen's fictions is involved. "*Pride and Prejudice*, written between October, 1796, and August, 1797, first published in 1813, and a second edition the same year, third edition, 1817; *Sense and Sensibility*, written in its present form between November, 1797 and 1798, though a portion was extracted from an earlier manuscript, in the form of letters, entitled *Elinor and Marianne*, first published in 1811, second edition, 1813; *Northanger Abbey*, written during 1798, and first published in 1818; *Mansfield Park*, written between 1811 and 1814, and first published in 1814; second edition in 1816; *Emma*, written between 1811 and 1816, and first published in 1816; *Persuasion*, written between 1811 and 1816, and first published in 1818."

classical and modern drama it lengthens chainwise and spreads fanwise in a long descent from Menander to Terence, from Terence to Molière, from Molière to Sheridan (with his griding Surfaces) down to a success not two years old in the commercialized drama of our American metropolis. On the sisterly side the theme reaches at least as far back as Martha and Mary in the New Testament, and comes down to yesterday in the *Marta y Maria* of Valdés and the Constance and Sophia of Arnold Bennett in the *Old-Wives' Tale*. The Austen mark is pleasantly conspicuous in the fact that the two sisters contrasted in this novel are both virtuous and affectionate women; they differ only in the degree in which they permit judgment to control feeling.

The conduct of the novel is careful and successful, though far from blameless. Two sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, expecting offers of marriage from two young men, are forsaken by their lovers without declaration or explanation in the first half of the book. The retirement of the two cavaliers induces a languor or slackness in the middle of the narrative comparable to the effect of the departure of the masculine element on a social assembly. For this shrinkage of interest the redress offered by the conclusion is imperfect.

But the stories claim a more complete analysis. Elinor Dashwood learns that Edward Ferrars, who has made tacit love to her, is bound by an early and

secret engagement to a young woman of inferior breeding called Lucy Steele. The secret is divulged; the young man is promptly disinherited by his vindictive and grasping mother; and he prepares by marrying the girl to try how far the fulfilment of duty can console its victim for a blighted love and a vanished income. Extrication comes from a novel quarter; the brother who has stripped him of his inheritance unexpectedly relieves him of his bride. The supplanter is decoyed into a secret marriage, and the release of Edward Ferrars is followed by his betrothal to Elinor and the reluctant forgiveness of the thwarted mother. The average novelist would call this material interesting, and the author of *Vanity Fair* would have lingered and luxuriated in the story of the arts by which the young girl substituted the rich brother for the poor one. Not so Miss Austen. She dislikes, or merely tolerates, this material. She is as slow in getting up to it and as quick in getting away from it as the decencies of the situation will permit. Two-thirds of the book is over before the divulging of the engagement which would start the interest for the average reader is accomplished, and the decisive events are narrated at second-hand in the briefest summary in the impatient conclusion of a somewhat leisurely and ambling tale. The haste was probably due in part to Miss Austen's discontent with the makeshift expedient by which she cleared the path of Elinor and Edward to their de-

ferred and improbable happiness. She was also not indisposed to evade the direct treatment of crises, as her management of the Lydia-Wickham affair in *Pride and Prejudice* clearly shows.

The conduct of the other story is subject to equal, if different, strictures. John Willoughby leaves Marianne Dashwood without making the offer to which his whole behavior has served as prelude and promise. Marianne follows him to London. Her disillusion is then effected by a series of incidents which are not uninteresting, but are at once so obvious and so meagre as to retard the speed and contract the volume of the narrative. Another suitor has been provided for Marianne in the person of an amiable and melancholy Colonel, twice her age and the object, at his first introduction, of her untiring and unsparing raillery. The renovation of Colonel Brandon in the esteem of Marianne might have seemed a seductive theme to a novelist who in *Pride and Prejudice* was to lavish time and pains on the rehabilitation of the rejected and discredited Darcy. But in *Sense and Sensibility* Miss Austen has stayed her hand. The embellishment of the Colonel is incidental and perfunctory; it consists chiefly in his bestowal of a rectory upon Edward Ferrars—a point of only indirect concern to Marianne—and his fetching of Mrs. Dashwood to her daughter's sick-bed. The courtship is unhesitatingly shirked; Miss Austen, for all her implacable worldly sense, may have been

woman enough to shrink from detailing a process by which a young girl was induced to marry a middle-aged gentleman who is the domicile—I had almost said the sepulchre—of all the virtues.

Sickness is a classic expedient for reviving our interest in heroines who are slipping into insignificance, and Miss Austen likes sickness for its own sake; she delights in its respectability. Accordingly Marianne, who seems likely to fall into abeyance in the last third of the story, is saved from this calamity by taking to her bed. It is only fair to this illness to note that it disappears with the most obliging celerity as soon as it has accomplished the rather trifling errand for which its presence was invoked. That Marianne should be sick in a house not her own whence the whole family, with the exception of a grandmother who is half a guest, have fled at the mere pronunciation of the name "typhus," appears forced in an author so studious of the normal as Miss Austen. The change of domicile is intended chiefly to provide an excuse for a penitential visit on the part of the mercurial and dashing Willoughby. He makes an explanation to the placable Elinor which he has the impudence, and Miss Austen the courage, to present as a defense of his behavior.

The two stories, as the outline shows, are essentially distinct; they are bound together after a fashion, however, by the intimacy of the two sisters who scarcely leave each other's sides, and there are one

or two secondary ligatures. Colonel Brandon, for instance, who is Marianne's suitor, is destined for Elinor by the prevalent opinion of the circle in which they move. As we have seen, it is Colonel Brandon who provides the rectory for Edward Ferrars. The interval between the two plots is lessened, or at least blurred, by the likeness of the two situations and the identical moral which is deduced from the contrasted behavior of the two sisters. I may remark here that the difference between Elinor and Marianne, whether in conduct or fortune, is probably not so wide as Miss Austen in the zeal of tutorship intended that it should be. Marianne's palpable indiscretions, the private excursions and the letters to Willoughby, are productive of no palpable misfortune. Her real error consists in the surrender of her heart without guarantees, and the guarded and provident Elinor has made the same mistake. A few months of anguish is the sum total of Marianne's penalty, and the endurance of a very little less is all the reward that Elinor reaps for the persevering exercise of the whole troop of circumspect and heedful virtues. It may be said in Miss Austen's defense that the support her narrative gives to the virtues is no more uncertain or unequal than the support they commonly receive from that lukewarm and hesitating moralist that we call life.

To return to the handling of the story. The volume of the two plots is small, and the reader who recalls

the plethora of minor incident, the incessant meetings and partings, the fuss and bustle, which mark the London section of the novel will be puzzled to relate this superflux of exertion to this shortage of accomplishment. The truth is that Miss Austen's main end is the exhibition of life and character for their own sake, and her specialty is not the great scene—hardly even the deciding or impelling scene—but the normal social occasion. The multiplying of these occasions without too rigid a scrutiny of their actual contribution to the outcome has resulted in a feebler story and a better novel. It is notable that side by side with this slackness in the pursuit of relevance there is an extreme, almost an extravagant, interest in the development of minor trains of consequence. Here is a little catena. First, John Dashwood meets his sister Elinor in a jeweler's shop. Second, he calls on her the next day. Third, he asks Elinor to take him to the Middletons. Fourth, he recommends his wife to call on the Middletons. Fifth, his wife complies. Sixth, friendliness results. Seventh, the Dashwoods invite Lady Middleton to their home, where Mrs. Ferrars is staying. Eighth, the Misses Steele, who have been invited to stay with Lady Middleton, hasten their acceptance. Ninth, they are included in the Dashwood invitation. Tenth, Lucy Steele meets Mrs. Ferrars. Miss Austen revels in this sort of generalship; her own temper has points of contact with

that of the satirized Mrs. Jennings. On the other hand, Colonel Brandon's supposed courtship of Elinor has almost no bearing on the outcome of the story. Willoughby's seduction of Colonel Brandon's ward is material only in the clearer revelation it affords of the infamies of that young wastrel's character. The utility of the Palmers appears to be confined to the provision of a house in which Marianne can be sick, the Colonel assiduous, and Willoughby histrionic. If Miss Austen had been a man, she would have enjoyed the vocation of a courier. To see people from place to place, to provide for their entrances and exits, and to get as much out of them as an adroit use of these opportunities permits would have given point and vivacity to life.

Miss Austen is unable or unwilling to dispense with the friendly offices of coincidence. Coincidence had not in her day fallen into that sere and yellow leaf to which the frost of latter-day criticism has reduced the green of its abundant foliage. In this novel Mr. Robert Ferrars is seen by chance in a jeweler's shop. Mr. John Dashwood is seen, equally by chance, in the same place. Edward and Lucy call on Elinor by chance at the same time. The encounter of the man-servant with Lucy Ferrars at Exeter is one of those alms of destiny to which the poverty of novelists is perennially grateful. I may add that the servant's mistake as to the identity of the bridegroom is one of those borrowings from

farce which a novelist of Miss Austen's calibre in our own time would find incompatible with self-respect. Far worse is the misunderstanding between Mrs. Jennings and Elinor in Chapter XL, where Elinor is talking about the gift of a rectory and Mrs. Jennings about an offer of marriage. Here the stale devices which realists contemptuously allow to farce prolong through a conference of appreciable length a misconception to which the bluntness of actuality would have put an end in sixty seconds.

I pass to an estimate of the characters. Elinor Dashwood is the personification of good sense and right feeling, and the instructress by precept and example of her impetuous and incautious mother and sister. The hardships of such a position are manifest, and nothing less than Miss Austen's wit and vitality could have extricated Elinor from the straits into which she is thrown by Miss Austen's irrepressible didacticism. "He really is not disgusting," said Gwendolen Harleth of Grandcourt, and insisted that the praise was generous for a man. The critic is half disposed to say of Elinor Dashwood: "She really is not disagreeable," and to say that for a paragon of discretion the praise is munificent. Our liking passes through crises at every turn, and its final safety is a form of miracle. The reader is aided by the fact that under Miss Austen's convoy he takes up his abode in the mind of Elinor, and a well-bred person feels a difficulty in quarreling with his hostess.

Elinor, moreover, has strong affections and even keen sensibilities, though, like captive princesses, the most they can do is to flutter a signal or drop a rose through the gratings of the tower in which her judgment has confined them. Possibly another help is her practical helplessness in many cases. Her temper is less rigid than her ideal, or what we may venture to call her own version of her temper. She seems, at first sight, a bureau, an official headquarters, to which all questions are automatically referred for instant and final adjudication. But, however rigid her judgment, her conduct abounds in compliances.

Elinor accompanies Marianne to London against her judgment. She is diplomatic in her treatment of her brother, of Fanny Dashwood, of the gadfly Lucy and of the buzz-fly Miss Steele. She does not openly protest against Marianne's letters to Willoughby. She accepts the hospitality of the Palmers in opposition to her initial prejudice. She hears Willoughby after her indignant refusal to hear him, and, by one of the subtlest touches in the book, allows herself to be swayed in his favor by the romantic charm of his person and manners. Miss Austen is after all so much wiser than her superflux of wisdom would suggest. The truth is that the novelist is as intensely social as she is conscientious, and if the essence of conscience is inflexibility, the essence of society is compromise. The rational woman is provisionally rational and ultimately woman.

Elinor is much better than her ungrateful rôle; Marianne is not quite so good as her vocation. She is imagined strongly, but thinly and brokenly as it were. She suffers from that glaze of formality which in Miss Austen's work overlays the really formal and the really informal characters alike. The twentieth century hardly knows what to do with a young woman to whom apostrophes of this type are feasible:

> And you, ye well-known trees—but you will continue the same.—No leaf will decay because we are removed, nor any branch become motionless although we can observe you no longer.

In lines like these the satirized Mrs. Radcliffe is vindicated—or avenged. Even where the heart is stirred, the creaking of the eighteenth-century stays in which its throbbings are confined is distinctly audible.

> "Nor I," answered Marianne with energy; "our situations then are alike. We have neither of us anything to tell; you, because you communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing."

The pitiless Taine remarked of Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* that Abelard would have cried out "Bravo" at certain passages, and on reaching the end would have reversed the letter to see if "For press" were not added to the superscription. If Marianne wrote as she talks, one could almost forgive a similar levity in Willoughby.

Deep passion is not Miss Austen's strong point, and Marianne's suffering has the vague though real impressiveness of a house of mourning which the spectator views from the remoteness of the pavement. As her business is largely to suffer, the resulting exclusion is considerable. The need of keeping her imprudences within strictly respectable limits has shortened the span of the character, and, as I have already intimated, her speedy recovery does not conduce to the energy of the thesis.

The first effect of Willoughby, as he comes dashing into the story with spurs jingling and bridle-bells tinkling, like a youthful chevalier, is distinct and promising. But with this first sharpness of impression Miss Austen's proficiency ceases. Her knowledge of a bad man was decorously limited. George Eliot in Tito or Grandcourt would spell you out a bad man, word for word and letter for letter; Miss Austen keeps warily aloof from the lip of the crater. She knows Willoughby's manners and that part of his temperament to which manners are the clew. She is not withheld by any visible squeamishness. Her account of Willoughby's worst offense is handled with a frankness and a discretion and an absence of any consciousness of either frankness or discretion which, in relation to her sex and epoch, is notable and laudable. The awe, the mystery, which encircle sex are entirely absent; her disapproval is emphatic, but her coolness is immovable. Willoughby is a

trumpery character. The curvettings and bridlings with which he dashes upon the stage in the outset of the story arouse a distrust which is rather confirmed than lessened by the final caracole of his repentance. Miss Austen leaves us at last with the impression that his desertion of Marianne and his betrayal of Eliza are criminal at best, and that, in an unpolished or unhandsome man, they would have been totally unforgivable.

Edward Ferrars is placed in direct contrast to Willoughby. Willoughby is gloss without substance; Edward is substance without gloss. The difficulty with Edward is that the absence of plumage is so much more demonstrable than the presence of marrow. Edward has the ill luck to be compelled always to carry a shyness which needs no nursing into situations which supply it with the most liberal encouragement. He is inactive and largely invisible; and when he is dragged upon the stage by the inexorable Miss Austen, his chief aim is to conceal his mind from the friends to whom he has been obliged to expose his person. His adhesion to the pestiferous Lucy seems a dismal if not a truckling type of virtue, and the American reader is not propitiated by his naïve view of the ministry as a steppingstone to a living in the double sense of a rectory and a livelihood. It is quite true that in this view of the church as a refectory he has the cordial support of his patroness, Miss Austen.

Colonel Brandon is the last of the three men in the story to whom the office of lover and suitor is committed. He is hampered in this function by an accumulation of years which exposes him to the contempt of romantic young women of eighteen. Colonel Brandon is thirty-five, and the touch of rheumatism from which he suffers is confessed by the novelist with a candor which may be classed with the heroisms—not to say the heroics—of conscientious realistic treatment. That touch of rheumatism is felt in Colonel Brandon's gait throughout the story. He is a very good, indeed a very efficient, man, if the only sound test, the test of deeds, be applied to his character, but we feel always that he is bandaged. He is the most recurrent, yet the most unobtrusive, of characters, and the reader starts at the perception of his arrival as he might at the discovery of the nearness of some quiet person who had entered the room on tiptoe. Even at the very end of the tale he can hardly be said to have laid aside his muffler; we know the facts, but we do not know the man. It is natural that he should be drawn to Marianne rather than to Elinor, between whom and himself is the obvious bond and the impalpable barrier of a precise conformity of tastes and principles. It is not so easy to understand his final conquest of Marianne even with the aid of a proviso that Marianne accepts him in the first instance on the unromantic basis of grateful friendship

and esteem. Discretion that is to be made amiable to indiscretion might surely assume a livelier and courtlier shape than it wears in the sedate—almost the lugubrious—Colonel.

Miss Austen's tolerance of inconsistency is evident in the changes undergone by two characters, Mrs. Jennings and Mr. Palmer, in the shifting exigencies of a varied novel. Mrs. Jennings as we first see her, is a vulgar gossip, wholly foolish and wholly contemptible. In the course of the story she becomes a convenience to Miss Austen, and Miss Austen is too robustly English to view any convenience with unqualified contempt. Mrs. Jennings is revamped. Her cheap good-nature is changed to an endearing benevolence; the folly which had pervaded and constituted her character is reduced to a tincture that makes her virtues pardonable by making them diverting. The change in Mr. Palmer, while much less conspicuous, is even more violent. When we are first introduced to this extraordinary person, the only characteristic he exhibits is a brutal and supercilious rudeness, and that characteristic is pushed to an extreme from which anybody but a demure and discreet clergyman's daughter engaged in the writing of realistic novels would have shrunk. Later on, when Mr. Palmer has a chance to be useful, half his brutality is obliterated at a stroke. These alterations are instructive. In Miss Austen's comic delineations the character is spitted on a trait, and the trait is

abnormally sharpened for the due performance of this trenchant office. This may pass, if the handling is brief and includes no diversity of functions. A person may stand on his peculiarities, as he may stand on the tips of his toes, for a little while, if he is content to do practically nothing else. But there is nothing like prolonged contact for the taming of superlatives, and nothing like variety of function for abatement of the rankness of caricature. Miss Austen's changes are tacit acknowledgments that the unrevised Mrs. Jennings and Mr. Palmer were libelous.

This confession really involves the whole prolific and interesting group of characters in Miss Austen for which the formula is the raising of a single trait to the highest power and the iteration of that trait with tireless insistence. People are not like that, whatever Smollett and Dickens and Miss Austen may think. The arbitrary modification of full-blown or full-grown characters is one of the artistic sins that spot the record of Dickens. I will take an illustration from that novel of Dickens which reperusal has lately freshened in my memory, the *Tale of Edwin Drood*. The lawyer, Mr. Grewgious, in that book is pure fool and butt in the extravagant and irrational scene in which he is first introduced to the amused but protesting reader. Later on, Mr. Grewgious's help is wanted by Dickens in some rather delicate transactions in the conduct of which a char-

acter and brain are indispensable. The equipment of Mr. Grewgious with these desiderata is carried out without hesitation or delay. Unsightly tricks of this sort excite the liveliest indignation in admirers of the authoress of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Mrs. Jennings has two daughters, Lady Middleton and Mrs. Palmer. They are like each other only in their brainlessness, Lady Middleton's folly taking the form of an inane silence, Mrs. Palmer's that of inane speech. Mrs. Palmer is the smarter performance, Lady Middleton the truer success. Mrs. Palmer's drivel is incessant and her good-nature is swashing, but beside her husband—and she is tactful enough never to leave his side—her very insipidities are lustrous. Lady Middleton has not the air of the woman of fashion she is presumed to be, at least not of the woman of high fashion; the *middle tone* in her, if I may venture the pun, is very noticeable. But the suggestion of well-bred and tranquil ineptitude by a very few strokes is expert; and as her specialty is silence she is not subject to that continuity in self-betrayal which is the retribution of loquacity in Miss Austen. Her husband, Sir John Middleton, is described by Goldwin Smith as "halfway between Squire Western and the country gentleman of the present day." This is gracious, almost obsequious, to Squire Western. Possibly as a social datum it might be approved by a committee of historians, but I find nothing in my own impres-

sion of Sir John to indorse it. I cannot think, with Goldwin Smith, that the character is hinged on its vulgarity. The hinge is brainless good-nature, and in the deft though sparse drawing I seem to feel that this good-nature is reciprocated by Miss Austen, who is less violent than usual in her chastisement of the brainlessness.

Fanny Dashwood is inhumanly simplified, and the same process that robs her of nature endows her with liveliness, if not with life. Her business is to clutch at property and to maltreat her husband's relatives, and in the pursuit of this vocation she is not allowed even those passing furloughs which Thackeray permits to Blanche Amory or Becky Sharp. John Dashwood, her husband, is a curious study. In him the crudities and delicacies of Miss Austen's handiwork are seen in operation side by side. He is a fool who talks; that is tantamount to saying that he is his own target, and his marksmanship is so expert that he is left at the end of the exhibition completely riddled by his own bullets. The crudity lies in that uniformity of method which never permits him to open his mouth without, so to speak, swallowing his own character. The delicacy lies in the art with which his own view of his character is suggested at the same time that the utter falsity of that view is laid bare to the least wakeful reader. The ground, the texture, of his character is selfishness and worldly greed, but there is a lining of de-

cency, humanity, and self-respect, and the lining is very thick and very soft. That is the delicate and worthy task—to portray inside of the fool and knave the man who is like ourselves in every point but the excess of his knavery and folly. The combination of abilities and ineptitudes in John Dashwood is mysterious. Here is a man of excellent business judgment, of perfect social tranquillity, of faultless ease in the handling of unexceptionable English; yet he is the dupe of the flimsiest pretenses and blind even to those inconsistencies which his own circle must have trained itself to perceive. He complains of poverty in the same breath in which he offers proofs of riches. He thinks a woman who invites two girls to spend a few weeks at her house in London is under a moral obligation to remember them in her will. I have no first-hand knowledge of England; in America folly is more symmetrical.

To Mrs. Dashwood, the mother, who is an unregenerate, or, if the reader pleases, an undegenerate, Marianne, Miss Austen is, for tactical reasons, rather inattentive; but the brand of truth which she exhibits seems to me more delicate than that which I find in the fuller portraitures of the younger women. The two daughters are encumbered by the necessity of serving at the same time as the poles of an antithesis and the stays of a thesis; Mrs. Dashwood has the leisure and freedom to be herself.

I am not sure but the best-drawn character in the

book is Lucy Steele. She finds the spot of vindictiveness in the gentlest reader, for her business throughout the book is to provide distress for Edward Ferrars and Elinor Dashwood, to the first of whom she serves as barnacle, to the second as gadfly. An early and heedless engagement has bound the scrupulous and submissive Edward to this incubus, and placed his honor between him and his later and lasting love for Elinor Dashwood. Lucy Steele is single-minded, courageous, and resolute. She is without manners, without affection, and without conscience. She is capable of meanness, hypocrisy, and treachery. At the same time it is impossible to detect in Lucy the smallest trace of harlotry, of Bohemianism, or of disorder. She is privateer, but not buccaneer. Her means and her ends alike find harborage within the securities and the decorums—those securities and decorums which so often serve as shelter to worse deeds than the deeds to which they serve as barrier. A Frenchman could not have so neatly separated the manœuverer from the adventuress.

We see Lucy only in her relations with Elinor Dashwood—relations in which her confidences are unmeasured, her attitude dissembling, and her jesuitry extraordinary. In the skill with which she is drawn there are occasional lacunæ. Lucy is supposed to talk bad English, but the stuff or tissue of which her English is composed is not bad at all. On the contrary, it is very good English upon which

patches of vile English have been purposely and inexpertly sewed. A second mistake, already mentioned, is the final stroke by which Lucy, having jilted Edward to marry Robert, allows Elinor to imagine that the marriage has gone forward without change of bridegrooms. This seems an overdraft on the badness of a character which has met all its obligations to the evil principle with the most commendable punctuality and exactness. The stroke, even if natural, seems artistically wrong. A touch of malignity is as injurious to the artistic perfection of the pure self-seeking embodied in Lucy Steele as a touch of benignity would have been.

Lucy has a sister, Anne Steele, a scatterbrain, frankly vulgar, who may be said to reek with good-nature. Her conversation is an unceasing current in which she not merely swims but splashes. She is drawn with a precision which by no means excludes gusto. Robert Ferrars, on whom Lucy is finally bestowed, has every claim to that privilege which imbecility and vanity can confer. He is hacked out with the broad-axe, but the vigor of the axeman's stroke is unmistakable.

CHAPTER II

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

I INCLINE to rank *Pride and Prejudice* among the best-plotted novels in English literature. This is far from holding it to be impeccable. It is unfortunately true that a novel need not be faultless—need not be free from grave faults, to be classed with the best-woven fabrics of the clumsy English looms. English novelists commonly write on the grand scale which makes the correlation of particulars difficult and irksome, and in general they are eager or preoccupied. Like the man who had been so busy in making money that he had wanted time to think about finance, they have been so lost in narrative that they have almost forgotten plot; and their forethought, when it has existed, has been moral and intellectual rather than artistic. Even the æsthetic re-quickening in the last years of the nineteenth century came almost too late for the amelioration of their plots. They found themselves ready to appropriate the patterns of their continental masters at the very time when those masters were preparing to teach them that art is truth and that truth is patternless. Accordingly, a strong, definite, and shapely plot, like that of *Pride and Prejudice*, has never lacked the pedestal of isola-

tion. For the most part the English have muddled through in novel-writing as in war. Lovers of literature will find solace in the thought that in the military field the habit has not acted as preventive to Blenheims and Trafalgars.

The plot of *Pride and Prejudice* belongs to that admirable class in which two processes, a flux and reflux, of approximately equal length and strength, are parted in the middle by a crest or equinox in which the first process finds an end and the second a beginning. This is the type which proved so captivating to the imagination of Gustave Freytag that he was decoyed into the error of making it an imperative formula for tragic drama. In Miss Austen's novel, Elizabeth Bennet accumulates dislike of Darcy throughout a volume; throughout a second volume she accumulates love; the arch finds its beautifully poised keystone in the rejection scene in which her aversion touches its acme. The manner of these changes is highly characteristic. The word "process" which I have applied to the movements is inexact, they are no more processes than a flight of steps or a series of ledges is an incline. The graduated is achievable by Miss Austen, but not the gradual. Elizabeth, in the first volume, collects evidence of Darcy's wickedness; in the second she collects evidence of his worth: and this evidence comes not in grains but in blocks. As soon as the rebuttal is complete, so strict a logician cannot delay the be-

stowal of the hand which is the irrefutable Q. E. D. Yet it is by no means unpleasing or unexciting to watch the deliberate movements of the crane by which block after block is swung into its due place in the massive lines of Miss Austen's geometric masonry.

The mingled correspondence and opposition in the two movements is worth noting. The inexcusable rudeness of Darcy to Elizabeth in volume first leaves a bruise to which a series of delicate courtesies in volume second applies the counteractive and appeasing salve. A scandalous count in the indictment against him in the first half of the book is his injustice and malignity toward an angelic personage called Wickham. In the second half we are informed that the object of these persecutions is a worthless ingrate on whom generosities have been vainly lavished. But the crowning offense in Darcy is his interference with the thriving mutual attachment of his friend Bingley and Elizabeth's sister Jane. This act is not only revoked in the second volume, but is more than counterpoised by an act of magnanimity toward another sister by which a prostrate reputation is placed not on its feet indeed, but on crutches, and repairs are effected in the highly reparable honor of the unexacting Bennet clan. The equation is not precise; precision would outrun nature. Even the general plan of the two movements is a departure from the truth, and owes all its brilliant virtuosity to the imposition on life of a symmetrical elegance

to which life itself is uncompromisingly hostile. Of itself, it would block Miss Austen's claim to the title of an inexorable realist.

The differences in merit between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* are emphasized in one point by the similarity of their materials. There are two sisters with two parallel love-affairs in both novels. But in *Sense and Sensibility* the union of the stories has little other basis than the union of the heroines, as if two lapdogs became companions rather than partners through the fact that their mistresses were inseparable. In *Pride and Prejudice*, on the other hand, the two stories are virtually one; they not only interlace; they interlock. Darcy, in destroying the happiness of Jane by the removal of Bingley (who, it may be incidentally remarked, is almost as removable as a joint-stool), has ruined his own prospects with the justly resentful Elizabeth, and his sanction of the renewal of Bingley's addresses to Jane is the prelude to the establishment of his own happiness. There is another point in which the two stories are superficially alike, but artistically different. In the middle of *Sense and Sensibility* the two cavaliers ride away; the interest slackens, almost languishes; and there is a "moated grange" effect in the forsaken cottage to which the name "Marianne" seems charmingly apposite. In *Pride and Prejudice*, likewise, the two heroes betake themselves to London, but the threat of languor for the story implicit

in this step is dispelled by the promptitude with which Darcy is recalled to the proscenium. It may be noted as a symptom of the times that the modest and discreet Jane pursues the fleeing suitor to London almost as promptly as the headlong and reckless Marianne. The maxim that "To the victor belong the spoils" appears to have regulated the conduct of the most exemplary young women of the period.

In *Pride and Prejudice* the fabric is minute. Observe the dense packing and close coherence of the little incidents which precede and provoke Darcy's final declaration to Elizabeth. Bingley becomes engaged to Jane. This brings Darcy and Elizabeth into contact. To gossiping countrysides one marriage suggests another. The report passes from the Lucases who belong to that countryside to their relatives, the Collinses, and from the Collinses to Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Lady Catherine visits Elizabeth to bully her into a refusal. Elizabeth betrays a willingness to accept. Lady Catherine, visiting Darcy, unwittingly allows him to divine this willingness. Darcy renews his proposal, and is accepted.

This is more than care; it is elaboration. It indicates not merely a love of good plots but a love of plotting. Meredith's plots have a similar careful minuteness, but the enjoyment they might afford to the reader is nullified by the onus of unravelling their complications. Miss Austen's admirable clear-

headedness makes even her minuteness lucid. The Gardiners are entirely subordinate, but they are enlisted in the plot three times; they serve as hosts to Jane, as escorts to Elizabeth, as helpers to Lydia. An ordinary novelist would have treated such auxiliaries as porters or hackmen to be changed at every station. When Mr. Collins marries Miss Lucas, that might serve as his congé from the novel at the hands of the easygoing, shiftless storyteller. Not so with Miss Austen. Further service is to be extracted from Mr. Collins. Elizabeth's visit to his wife becomes the occasion for Darcy's first proposal, and his value as a medium for the transmission of Longbourn gossip to Lady Catherine has been noted in a former paragraph.

But if Miss Austen's care in the provision of sequences is unresting, I cannot affirm that her choice of ligatures is always sound. The means by which Jane and even Elizabeth are made to spend a night or more under Bingley's roof may be called unscrupulous, but they are modesty itself in comparison with the effrontery of the methods by which Elizabeth of all persons is conveyed into the grounds at Pemberley, yes, even into the unmitigated presence of Mr. Darcy himself. Still, even where Miss Austen is brazen, she is careful according to her lights. To rationalize the visit to Derbyshire, Mrs. Gardiner was long before appointed to be born and bred in that county, and an effect of innocence is

given to the choice of that district as a destination by making it a reluctant second choice. The ball at Netherfield Park illustrates both the skill and the heedlessness of the writer. To make Darcy's conduct in deporting Bingley excusable, two things are requisite: he must be convinced of Jane's indifference and of the hopeless vulgarity of the vulgar members of the Bennet family. The second of these objects is obtained with admirable foresight, but the first, which is even more important, is ignored. Indeed, two points in Jane's behavior make for a conclusion precisely opposite to that which it is needful to implant in Darcy's mind, and the elasticity of the term "gentleman" in Miss Austen's day is proved by his pursuit of his unchivalrous object without forfeiture of that title.

In a review of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* the Bennet family merits the first place. A family, as Americans understand that term, they are not; they are a congeries. They are bedded and boarded in the same enclosure, but a family life is unimaginable in their case. Even under the double disadvantage of the father's neglect and the mother's attention it is difficult to conceive that Kitty and Lydia should have sprung from the same stem of which Jane and Elizabeth were the primary offshoots. Sisters may be as far apart morally as Goneril and Cordelia, as far apart intellectually as Dorothea and Celia Brooke; but, if reared in one

household, they can hardly differ in manners as Rosalind differs from Audrey in *As You Like It* or as Romola differs from Tessa in George Eliot's Florentine story. Breeding, being more superficial, is more teachable and less variable than either intellect or character. The two eldest and the two youngest sisters in the Bennet household are divided by an incongruity of this type.

Mr. Bennet is well drawn, though sometimes he seems little more than a salver for his own pleasantries. The appearance is unjust. He has a character apart from his witticisms, but he and his witticisms are practically inseparable, and in their seductive and distracting company his character, though visible, is hardly seen. No one ever joked better, but his lazy tolerance is more characteristic than his wit, which is almost too consummate to be individual. One imagines his wit, when not springing, to be always couchant for a spring, or rather perhaps one imagines his condition between jokes to be syncope. He is described interestingly enough as an odd mixture of "quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice," and one can imagine that in a richer soil and sunnier climate he might have matched felicities with the Bromfield Corey of Mr. Howells's *Rise of Silas Lapham*. But Mr. Bennet's lot was less fortunately cast, amid earthier and grosser conditions, on a social order in which the farm-horse took the girls to fashionable parties. He is overridden with

women—woman-rid as the schoolmaster whom Charles Lamb avoided and pitied was boy-rid. A little henpecked by his wife, he finds in irony both solace and revenge; in his encounters with her he is perfectly secure of an absolutely ineffectual victory, since his shafts, though unerringly aimed, are stopped by the cuirass of her insensibility. I think we should be more comfortable with Mr. Bennet if he had less to do or did more; he reaps the guilt, without the grace, of nonchalance. His indignation at his daughter's elopement is vehement but short-lived, and the baseness of his new son-in-law supplies his returning levity with a fresh target. Idleness, the least active of passions, is perhaps finally master of the swiftest and fieriest of its competitors. I think there are possibilities of delicacy, of pathos, in Mr. Bennet which his creator lacked the power to exploit; a century later, a more intuitive Miss Austen would have drawn a more intimate Mr. Bennet.

The character of Mrs. Bennet illustrates the firmness and sureness of Miss Austen's hand. It illustrates no less clearly the utter want of temperance, of shading, almost of decency, in her satirical delineations. It is brilliant and it is garish. Many women have had follies akin to Mrs. Bennet's, but no live woman ever devoted herself to the quite superfluous task of proving that she was a fool with the perseverance and assiduity of Mrs. Bennet. The wariest of fools are off their guard sometimes

they stray into remarks which would be conceivable on the lips of intelligence. There is a neutral ground between wit and folly in which perhaps both wit and folly spend the greater part of their time. Miss Austen scores every minute with Mrs. Bennet, and at the end of the book her recompense is a splendid score rather than a human being. With her usual ruthlessness Miss Austen will allow Mrs. Bennet nothing; motherly feeling is conceded only in the form of a weakness. The woman has undoubtedly strength of a kind—the strength of an undivided nature. Counsel, experience, suffering, leave no dent on the fixity of her prepossessions. She is a consummate exhibit, but she is hardly a character.

Jane is probably commemorative—the liquidation of some debt of affection and homage. She is the angelic person who delights the middle-class reader, and she is naturally rather tedious to that kind of upper-class reader who regulates his aversions by the raptures of the middle class. In Jane there is a contrast between the softness of the material and the firmness of the handling which is interesting to the thoughtful student of Miss Austen. In calling the material soft I do not contest Jane's possession of judgment and a kind of fortitude. We are impressed with the strength of her defenses, even while we are a little impatient of the weakness which requires the evocation of so much hardihood for its subdual. We

like Jane, but perhaps we are tried by her emotion when we ought to be touched by it. We feel pain for her, but we do not feel that pleasure in our pain which draws and wins us in the case of Ellen Douglas or of Lily Dale, We are behind a closed door, and the exclusion magnifies our sense of the suffering, while it denies us the solace of participation.

Elizabeth's Bennet's value as a character is large, though not transcendent, and her interest as a study is extreme. If it is hard to find room for Jane's judgment in the rifts of her sensibility, it is hard to find room for Elizabeth's sensibility in the crevices of her judgment. We might think her made by formula; her very speech seems diagramed. These impressions are delusive. Elizabeth has all the human, all the womanly, traits, but she holds them by the oddest of tenures. Her figure possesses the indispensable feminine curves, but these curves are so gradual and so elongated that in viewing any small arc of her character we might readily mistake them for straight lines. Her delightful humor should temper the precision of her intellect, but the humor itself has a sharpness of definition so unusual that it all but reënforces the precision it should qualify. Elizabeth has a woman's variations, but her shifts are so massive and so deliberate that to a remote or careless glance they have much the air of constancy. She has impulses, as a woman should have, but the reader must know her pretty well, before he can tell

these impulses from plans. In short, there is a woman, even a girl, inside Elizabeth, but you must rummage to find either. Compare her with Beatrice in Shakespeare, with Diana Vernon in Scott's, *Rob Roy*, with Patience Oriel in Trollope's *Doctor Thorne*. What is the difference? In the last three cases the temperament wields the intelligence, and is dignified by the brilliancy of its utensil. In Elizabeth the intelligence wields—or seems to wield—the temperament. In the firm edges and broad surfaces of her character there is both satisfaction and unrest. There is not a fold in her personality, or if research lights upon a fold it is so straight and so severe that it leaves an effect of added candor, not of coyness. So much formality would have frozen a less spirited woman; so much spirit would have ignited less formality. Elizabeth's position is curiously intermediate.

In Mary Bennet Miss Austen courted disaster. Miss Austen's own serious conversation is exaggerated almost to the point of burlesque in respect of the conversation of real people. One shudders to think what will happen when Miss Austen sets forth her own notion of exaggeration and burlesque. Mary justifies the shudder.

If Kitty is the least interesting, she is likewise the least exceptionable, of the portraits in the Bennet family. In the lifelike limpness and tameness of this subsidiary character the evocative force of a very

few touches, when the few touches are Miss Austen's, is happily evinced.

Lydia Bennet herself is hardly more reckless than Miss Austen is reckless in the lengths to which she permits the boisterousness and shamelessness of Lydia to go. The drawing is unbridled. Here is a girl who disgraces herself, tries and sentences herself in every speech—a thing hardly compatible with human nature. Her want of conscience, her want of decorum, are perhaps barely conceivable. But can it be imagined that a girl whose pleasures and ambitions are purely social should be absolutely indifferent to the preservation of her claims to the respect or even the tolerance of society? She is a gentleman's daughter; she has two sisters who are models of refinement; and she has not one ladylike instinct, not one vestige of decorum. Scott is thought to be impromptu and swashing in comparison with Miss Austen, but compare the shading in the character of the compromised and fugitive Effie Deans with Miss Austen's big bow-wow portrayal of Lydia Bennet.

Nevertheless gross as the characterization is, it is vigorous in its crude way. If the strokes are few, their vividness is unequalled; and, if they have no support in human nature, they reënforce each other. Even individuality is secured, though how individuality can be imparted to a character that has neither variety nor moderation is a paradox before its ac-

complishment and a secret afterward. Lydia's individuality rests mainly on a self-reliance which gives a massiveness to her very levity and is intrinsically a respectable trait. I think that Miss Austen felt this, though I doubt if she was awake to her own feeling.

Darcy, the problem of the book, is also its failure. He is neither firmly drawn nor clearly understood. A really estimable character is to appear intolerable throughout the first half of a book, and to reveal a climax of virtue in the last half. The condition of success in this adventure is that no offense shall be specified in the premises which cannot be forgiven as venial or explained as illusory in the conclusion. Miss Austen is too fond of violent coloring to observe this rule. Darcy is merely the shell of a character, and the two lips of the shell will not meet.

When he first appears, he speaks insultingly of a young girl within her hearing. After that, all is over, and to search the character for virtues is to delve among ruins for salvage. Goldwin Smith's comments on this behavior leave nothing whatever to be said either in supplement or in retort. "Nobody but a puppy would reply when he was asked to let himself be introduced to a young lady, 'She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men.'" Strange things no doubt passed as ladies

and gentlemen in Miss Austen's day, but it is difficult to imagine that puppyhood and magnanimity shared a character between them in any age. Darcy has not exhausted his littleness in this remark. The thrift of Miss Austen has provided him with a reserve of enormities. He insults Elizabeth in the act of soliciting her hand. Later on, he writes her a letter in which he vilifies her family, and excuses this indecency on the characteristic ground that "my character required that it be written and read." In a word, the recovery of her esteem is to be purchased by her mortification in the perusal of insults to her nearest relatives. This is the conduct of a man whose character, in the sequel, is to be pictured as the abode and meeting-place not only of all the virtues but of all the delicacies. One does not envy the virtues and the delicacies their lodgings.

Miss Austen's explanation of all this is that he was spoiled in his youth, that his pride was not innate or ingrained, but a cloak or even a shawl, which dropped off at once and forever the moment a young woman with a mind of her own gave it a vigorous twitch by rejecting its wearer. Darcy, however, is long past the juvenilities of life, and his strong character—we are assured that it is strong—is fully ripened. His pride is not a gentleman's pride, but a sullen and forbidding arrogance, a pride that flaunts its own withdrawals and isolations, that battens on the mortifications it inflicts. He is like Dombey, except that

he is not absolute fool, and the change he exhibits is only a little less incredible than the change by which Dombey, in the language of the uncompromising Taine, "spoiled a fine novel." His churlishness in society would have a certain excuse, if, like the imperious Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, he had a temperament to which society was an episode or a bagatelle. But Darcy is as much a social animal as Bingley or Wickham; he is that unpleasing and unlucky combination in which the social ideal consorts with the unsocial temper.

> An owl I fancied scared by night,
> A fish that had the water-fright—

though in Darcy it is dislike rather than scare that is visible.

There is a stiffness in almost all the man's movements; it abates a little in the spring warmth of his first hesitating attraction toward Elizabeth, but soon reasserts itself, especially in the love-making, which has an effect of being done by clockwork. Even his anger is heavy; it makes him vehement, but it cannot make him supple. There is one happy stroke in which Miss Austen, who is wiser than she sometimes chooses to let her patrons suspect, indicates the survival of the old man in the spick-and-span paragon whom she has obligingly revamped for the delectation of the uncritical reader. When he revokes the inhibition he has laid upon Bingley,

Elizabeth cannot "help smiling at his easy manner of directing his friend. . . . Elizabeth longed to observe that Mr. Bingley had been a most delightful friend—so easily guided that his worth was invaluable; but she checked herself." Does Miss Austen often check herself, with the satiric truth balancing on her lips?

As portraits I prefer either Bingley or Wickham to Darcy. The delineation is sparing, almost frugal, in both cases; the margin round the text is blank and broad. Bingley, slight as he is, possesses an individuality, the key to which may possibly be found in his union of impulsiveness with docility. He is one of those persons in whom an effect of general adequacy to the immediate occasion is combined with final insignificance. He is not a mere nobody; he is not a mere anybody: yet we feel that his proximity to both those characters might have made a more perceptive wife than Jane uncomfortable. That his winningness should somehow percolate through the scant portrayal to the indifferent mind of the half-attentive reader is proof of the delicacy of Miss Austen's touch.

Side by side with the attachable and detachable Bingley, we have in Wickham another happy illustration of the *multum in parvo* form of character-drawing. We know of Wickham's person only what we can extract from the brief generalities of a single uncommunicative sentence. "His appearance was

greatly in his favour; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address." We do not hear his voice, or discriminate his tones, and his speeches, which are conscientiously reported, are suggestive of an abstract and colorless propriety. Yet somehow Wickham is got before us. His entrance is clandestine, but his presence is unmistakable. The word that embodies him, to my imagination at least, is velvety. He is the demure, pensive, and pathetic rascal; he had wished to be a clergyman, and he is not unlike the sort of man whom one can imagine the Reverend Laurence Sterne to have been—at any rate that traditional Sterne whom Thackeray amused himself by impaling in the *English Humourists*. His aplomb is exemplary; it is very nearly as good as innocence. Miss Austen, who is the kind of person to accept a *bon mot* as expiation for a felony if the transaction could be kept inviolably secret, is rather more tolerant of Wickham than so responsible a woman has any right to be.

I do not think that the prodigious and portentous Mr. Collins is fully entitled to the superlative praise he has elicited in certain quarters. He is rather too unqualified himself to be admired without qualification. Miss Austen's stroke is bold and blunt, and she begrudges the character every delicacy—I mean of course artistic, not moral, delicacy—which could impair its rollicking completeness. There is a con-

ceptual felicity in the union of egregious self-importance with gross toadyism. The sycophant to rank who is boaster and bully to his inferiors is by no means a rare figure, but the imperturbable self-respect of the incorrigibly fawning Mr. Collins is something for which memory is slow to furnish parallels. His flunkyism has a peculiar literary virtue; it is not in the least disinterested, but, in a gross way, it is sincere. He wants the wages, but he likes the job. What is policy in its origin becomes religion in the process; most religions have doubtless grown up in the same way. Thackeray, with his proclivity for moral discovery, showed us later, in his account of Tom Tusher, how caste-worship might turn inward. "'Twas no hypocrisy in him to flatter, but the bent of his mind, which was always perfectly good-humoured, obliging, and servile."

Mr. Collins is amusing, undoubtedly, but he fatigues almost as much as he enlivens. The pungency of verbiage has been overrated. Even in the famous and excellent Micawber, it is doubtful if the rotundity of the periods is to be counted as yeast or dough in the ingredients of that eccentric bread-making. The lawyers in Browning's *Ring and the Book* are intolerable. The chief satisfaction of laughing at a character is to feel that we are getting the better of him, and, even while we laugh at Mr. Collins, we feel that his mighty periods and redoubtable diction are getting the better of us. The laugh-

ter cannot pierce the bore, but the bore, as his name wittily indicates, can penetrate anything, including the laugher.

What chiefly troubles me in Mr. Collins is the reconciliation of his sophistications with his clownishness. There is not the slightest artistic reason why a man who writes an English far beyond the capacity of most professional men in America, and who makes a point of scrupulous adhesion to the ritual of politeness should not insult his kinsfolk and triumph in their misfortunes. But, while he may be as low-minded as a carter in the substance of his communication, I doubt if he could address a gentleman in these terms:

> The death of your daughter would have been a blessing in comparison of this. And it is the more to be lamented, because there is reason to suppose, as my dear Charlotte informs me, that this licentiousness of behaviour in your daughter has proceeded from a faulty degree of indulgence; though, at the same time, for the consolation of yourself and Mrs. Bennet, I am inclined to think that her own disposition must be naturally bad, or she could not be guilty of such an enormity at so early an age. . . . They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one daughter will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others; for who, as Lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family? And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect, with augmented satisfaction, on a certain event of last November; for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace.

This passage appears to be enjoyed; at all events the letter is quoted in full by Goldwin Smith as one

of the "charming" things in *Pride and Prejudice*. To me it seems neither enjoyable nor true. I do not quarrel with its vindictiveness or cruelty; I quarrel with its open vulgarity. This is not the brutality of the parsonage, though parsonages may be brutal in their kind; it is the brutality of the sponging-house, the barrack, and the counter, with a bedizenment of Johnsonese which those haunts could not parallel. I may add that to laugh at Mr. Collins in this phase is almost a form of complicity, and admission of kinship. A world in which the record of insults to sensitive women in calamity can amuse the refined is of one substance with the world in which their perpetration can delight the vulgar.

Charlotte Lucas, who marries Mr. Collins for prudential reasons, is hardly drawn at all, yet her situation is strangely disquieting. In the few plain words in which her sedate and steadfast fortitude is suggested to the wakeful reader there is the intimation of a tragedy which awes us like the neighborhood of death. That the martyrdom is voluntary and that the martyr is pedestrian and calculating does not alter the decorous grimness of a situation in the drawing of which the pencil of Mary Wilkins Freeman might have found an acrid pleasure. Charlotte says nothing, and Miss Austen very little; the continence of both is impressive, almost dismaying. One thinks with heartbreak of a social order in which a woman of family and education could find marriage

with Mr. Collins the preferable alternative. Literature has strange repercussions, and in this quiet English country-side, amid these inexorable decorums, I catch a faint foreshadowing of the dilemma (or trilemma) from which a nimble and bustling French dramatist was to rend the veil with cruel abruptness in the *Three Daughters of Monsieur Dupont*. Nothing makes me respect Miss Austen more than her portrayal of Charlotte Collins.

Miss Austen requites herself for the hush in which she has enshrined the homespun tragedy of Charlotte by the shrillness of her portrayal of the arrogant and domineering Lady Catherine de Bourgh. They say Miss Austen is quiet. The elderly friends of young Marlow in the *Good-Natured Man* said that he was quiet. They had not seen him with the barmaids. The discoverers of quiet in Miss Austen have surely not seen her with the titled aristocracy. Thackeray was a high colorist, a reveller in extremes, but the difference between Lady Kew, for instance, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh is the difference between an extravagant human being and a performer, a trick mule, whom his trainer exhibits to a delighted audience. I grant the excellence of the training and the merit of the tricks; but the mule never steps off the platform. Miss Austen in a quiet novel which leisurely people are to read by a cosy fireside draws a character of the sort which Molière or Congreve would have adapted to the glare of a

theatre—that is to say, she excludes all points but the points of highest relief. The series of volleys of which this woman's conversation is made is inconsistent—I will not say with the virtue or the decency—but with the laziness and fickleness—of ordinary human nature. Her daughter, Miss de Bourgh, is put on the low ration of half-a-dozen sentences to an entire book, but those few and scattered words, chosen with infallible judgment, make her a sounder and more credible human being than her mother.

Miss Bingley, like many of Miss Austen's unpleasant characters, unites the diction of an academician with the manners of a housemaid. She is clear enough—unendurably clear in many particulars, but I have a sense of fissures, of lacunæ, in the delineation. She is like a book from which handfuls of pages have been casually torn; all is felt to be capable of unification, but the connective tissue has been snatched away, and incompleteness puts on the guise of incoherence.

The other members of the Darcy-Bingley group may be passed over with the single exception of the inconspicuous but unforgettable Mr. Hurst, of whom Miss Austen supplies the following account: "As for Mr. Hurst, by whom Elizabeth sat, he was an indolent man, who lived only to eat, drink, and play at cards; who, when he found her prefer a plain dish to a ragout, had nothing to say to her." Another

hint or two of equal meagreness are furnished later on, and Miss Austen, whose concern for Mr. Hurst seems to be patterned on his own solicitude for Elizabeth, has completed her portrait of this porcine individual. In the normal writer—even in the normal strong writer—this handful of vulgarities would be nothing; yet somehow in the utterance of these meagre phrases Miss Austen has smuggled a soul, or whatever in his primitive make-up takes the place of a soul, into the sluggish and sensual Mr. Hurst. Of just this form of magic I am not sure that even Shakespeare has given proof.

I have commented on sixteen distinct characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. I doubt if another novel of its size can show sixteen characters who invite or permit comment. To these might be added a list of persons who are by no means wholly indistinct, Georgiana Darcy, Mrs. Hurst, the two Gardiners, Mrs. Philips, Colonel Fitzwilliam, Maria Lucas, Sir William Lucas. Here are twenty-four persons to whom individuality in various amounts is allotted in a novel which, by the scale of Dickens and Thackeray and George Eliot, must be accounted short. Yet the novel has not that effect of being cumbered or littered with characters which is more or less noticeable in Scott's *Peveril of the Peak* and Mr. Howells's *Hazard of New Fortunes*. The minor figures are not tufted or ranged in scattered groups, and the eminence of the primary actors is never threatened by the

intrusion of the subordinates. I must not close the chapter without noting the rather frequent shifts of place in the narrative, and the ease and convenience with which the transfers are effected under the unhurried but unpausing conductorship of Miss Austen.

CHAPTER III

NORTHANGER ABBEY

Northanger Abbey has a motive and a story, but the bearing of the story on the motive is very obscure, and, so far as the obscurity is penetrable, unsatisfactory. The author wishes to reprove the romanticism of a fiction-reading young girl. Sheridan had done the same thing not ineffectually in Lydia Languish, and an older form of the same dreamy and paralyzing romanticism had been rebuked by Lessing in the *Schwaermerei* of the heroine of *Nathan the Wise*. The obvious course in such a fable is to lead the heroine from daydreams into indiscretion and from indiscretion into misfortune or difficulty. Miss Austen, however, hardly pursues this course. Her heroine does indeed run heedlessly into two or three imprudent and improper acts in calling alone upon the Tilneys, but these are blunders for which it is difficult to make Mrs. Radcliffe and the *Mysteries of Udolpho* even indirectly responsible. Her romantic theory of General Tilney's conduct to which I shall refer later is unproductive of any evil to herself; and the semi-romantic misadventure which expels her from the General's house has its real

origin in the dustiest of calculations in which Catherine has neither guilt nor share.

Catherine Morland is not even a romantic character; she seems intended as a rebuke and corrective to romance.

No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be a heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her. Her father was a clergyman without being neglected or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard, and he had never been handsome. He had a considerable independence, besides two good livings, and he was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters. Her mother was a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution. She had three sons before Catherine was born; and, instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as any body might expect, she still lived on—lived to have six children more—to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health herself. A family of ten children will always be called a fine family, where there are heads, and arms, and legs enough for the number; but the Morlands had little other right to the word, for they were in general very plain, and Catherine, for many years of her life, as plain as any. She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features; so much for her person, and not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind.

Miss Austen allows her heroine a plain girlhood, but her courage falters at the threshold of maturity. She is no Charlotte Brontë to say to her sisters (in relation to *Jane Eyre*): "I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as inter-

esting as any of yours." This is implacable self-discipline. Jane Austen was not bred among the rigors and self-macerations of Haworth. Abnegation in Kent and Hampshire has its limits; and when Catherine is to visit Bath and see young men, nature, equally friendly to budding girls and rising novelists, is called in to renovate her physique. The concession is large, but Catherine is not wholly untrue to the tradition of her noisy, dirty, and athletic childhood. Her first exploit, on venturing into the world, is to fall instantly and irreparably in love with a young man whose main attraction is his raillery, and the prime object of whose raillery is the absurdities of the producers and consumers of romance. At the end of the book she marries this young man, magnanimously overlooking his possession of a large income and an enviable position.

There is, however, in Catherine's nature another coil for the analyst to unwind. She is unromantic, but she is romanticistic. At Bath she forms a passion for Mrs. Radcliffe which so far colors her view of life as to impart vividness to her expectations of Northanger Abbey. Miss Austen, in a word, has commissioned the same young person to serve as antithesis to the Radcliffe heroine and as illustration of the flightiness of the Radcliffe reader. I do not say that the combination is impossible; from reader to heroine is a far cry; and, in reading, a man may court those idealisms which subjection to the God of

things as they are has remorselessly banished from his practice. But Miss Austen's art seems to me unwieldy and unthrifty in the appointment of the same person to both parts. It may be said that the difference between Catherine's real and imaginary self is the point of the book. If so, I cannot think that the point is effectively made. We remember the case of Julia Mills in David Copperfield—Julia who sang "Affection's Dirge," and married an old Scotch Crœsus with great flaps of ears. We remember the case of Blanche Amory, who sighed for a paladin, and, after a vain assault upon a brewer, married a cook. If Catherine had married dollars after yielding her heart or her fancy to witticisms, she might have been counted among these renegades to sentiment. But since her first, last, and only object is Henry Tilney, who is neither romantic enough nor unromantic enough to make his capture a pointed victory for either side, I cannot see that her daydreams really becloud her mind or that her conduct really unmasks her disposition.

The truth is that the satire on romance has no real or logical relation to the slender plot of *Northanger Abbey*. Imagine the story to have taken shape by itself; then four additions or modifications will bring the novel to its present form. First, a few paragraphs will be delightfully rewritten from the point of view of their contrast with the habits and prescriptions of romance. Second, Catherine Mor-

land is lent a copy of the *Mysteries of Udolpho.* Third, the addition of a few Gothic windows and feudal trappings converts General Tilney's country house into an abbey. Fourth, Catherine is presented with two or three romantic misconceptions which are dispelled without the faintest damage to herself or the slightest profit to the story. The satire can be lifted clean out of the frame of the narrative, and the narrative will not even show a dent.

The delusions which are foisted upon Catherine are the least acceptable portions of the tale. She believes she has discovered an ancient manuscript in a cavity of a black and gold Japan cabinet in her bedchamber; the morning light reveals nothing worse than a laundry bill. The childishness of this adventure would seem to be pretty evenly divided between Miss Austen and Catherine. This is the grade of burlesque which the Sunday newspaper might be glad to admit to its columns of syndicated fiction, or which the school-girl essayist might read aloud to the willing laughter of uncritical classmates. The second point is a little graver, but even more ridiculous. Catherine frames the notion that General Tilney has murdered his wife. This nightmare is detected and gently dispelled by the general's younger son. On first thought we are inclined to say that the attribution of the mistake to any person in his senses is as crazy as the mistake itself. A little introspection shows us that chimeras as frantic

as this do knock at minds whose sanity we are indisposed to question, and that they are received with a hospitality which the hosts themselves would scoff at in another person. This is a fact, and yet our objection to the incident in Jane Austen proves impervious to our recognition of the fact. The truth is that delusions of this sort are on the same footing as dreams in their adaptation to record. Dreams are as much a part of experience as purchases or conflagrations, but their irrelevance to ordinary reality is such that they are remanded to silence except where their aptness or their influence is extraordinary, or where emphasis is concentrated on the hinterlands of the imagination. In Miss Austen's cool, clearheaded, good-humored narrative a vagary of this sort seems as misplaced as a secret panel in a railway station.

The main plot may be condensed into two or three sentences. Catherine Morland, in a first sojourn at Bath, falls in love with a vivacious young clergyman, Henry Tilney, whose response to her affection is not the less sincere for being gentle and leisurely. Catherine spends several weeks at Northanger Abbey by invitation of Henry's father, General Tilney, by whose order she is later on ejected from the house with a cruel abruptness unsoftened by explanations. The General had invited her on the baseless report that she was rich, and now drives her out on the better grounded, but not quite

accurate, report that she is penniless. The young son follows Catherine to her home, and marriage instantly follows on the ungracious consent of the muddle-headed father. The plot, though scant, is spacious enough to include two gross improbabilities, that the general should be prepared to risk his son's happiness with a girl whose fortune was attested only by rumor, and that he should brave the tongues of the county by an act of violence which stamped him as dupe no less than ruffian.

I have omitted certain minor trains of incident; my ability to omit them in a summary of the main plot is proof enough of their logical detachment. Isabella Thorpe, Catherine's friend in Bath, engages herself to a young clergyman, whom she jilts for the sake of a young captain, by whom she is ruthlessly and promptly flung aside. These circumstances are related to Catherine's story only by the purely mechanical links that the clergyman is Catherine's brother and the captain is Henry Tilney's. There is also a bragging and brawling young bully, John Thorpe, who makes slapdash love to Catherine between oaths and whip-crackings. An attempt has been made to give this fact a bearing on Catherine's relations with the Tilneys, but the device betrays as much awkwardness as conscience. General Tilney's informant as to Catherine's wealth and as to her poverty is John Thorpe. Now John Thorpe's bluster hardly imposes on the artless Catherine, whose

ignorance at eighteen is abysmal; General Tilney is a man of the world: yet in a matter vital to his interest General Tilney reposes implicit confidence in the word of a stranger whose blackguardism is vociferous.

It has been correctly observed that the second part of *Northanger Abbey* is less interesting than the first. There is a curious break and falling-off in the middle of the tale which I can only explain on the theory that it underwent some mysterious internal lesion. It was prosperous and joyous in its own course; it swerved from that course without adequate reason; and it ceased to prosper and rejoice. The Bath part has a charm peculiar to itself in Miss Austen's work, a charm almost anticipative of the lighter and readier touch of the later decades of the nineteenth century. There is a brisk patter of incident, a light, sprightly cursiveness, a gayety of movement that sweeps along even the disappointments and heartaches in the alacrity of its buoyant course. In a word it is the sort of story that thrives in a pump-room and mopes in an abbey. Why, then, send it to an abbey? I do not mind an *Il Penseroso* after my *L'Allegro*, if I can have a Milton to write it for me; but Miss Austen's *Il Penseroso* would tempt nobody to forsake "the gay motes that people the sunbeam" in Bath or any other cheerful watering-place. Miss Austen has not even the excuse of having wound up her affairs in Bath. Her

affairs in Bath are most distinctly not wound up; the affairs of Isabella plead for further elucidation on the spot, and John Thorpe's pursuit of Catherine actually clamors for a settlement of its claims in the place of its origin. But Miss Austen packs us off, bag and baggage, with a peremptoriness which she might have learned from the hare-brained General Tilney himself. Of course there is the satire on romance to supply a motive; but if the satire on romance is to furnish us with no better amusement than we find at Northanger Abbey, I think the ghost of Mrs. Radcliffe is avenged.

The first remark on Catherine Morland's character has been anticipated in my comments on the plot. She has a taste for romantic novels, but the texture of her mind is wholly unromantic. Romanticism has not struck in; it merely dusts the surface of the character. Her charm lies very largely in an incipient good sense which is held down for the moment by her ignorance of reality and her delight in fiction. The body has barely flowered, and the mind is still unblown, and the result is a grace which is rather seasonal than personal. Her mind is not only simple; it is plain; she will pass from girlhood to matronhood without any interval of young-ladyship. Strangely enough, I find her the most winning of Miss Austen's heroines in the absence of nearly every quality which makes the heroines of other novelists pleasant in my eyes. I am rather shocked to find myself pre-

ferring her to Elizabeth, that "darling child," on whom her parent lavished a fondness that reminds one a very little of Sir Walter Elliot and the Elizabeth whom he blindly favored.

I think I am drawn to Catherine by the fact that she is the only one of the heroines who acts like a young girl. Anne Elliot's youthfulness is past; she already wears the willow, and her attitude imitates its droop. Emma, Elizabeth, and Elinor (they run to E's like the early Saxon kings) are not really young. I reject the futility of baptismal registers and the vain umpireship of the family Bible. They all impress us as having sat on boards; we are lucky if we do not feel that they are sitting on them in our very presence. Marianne's conversation is ten years older than her behavior. I shall be told that Fanny Price is a young girl. Miss Becky Sharp was obliged by circumstances to be her own mamma; to my mind, Fanny Price is obliged by nature to be her own maiden aunt. But Catherine Morland is young in the fashion of young girls whom I actually know, simple, warm-hearted, pleasure-loving, diffident between her impulses and eager behind her shyness, a few strong interests and vivid likings checkering the unresponsiveness of girlhood to the proffers and urgencies of life. Miss Austen has stinted her of attributes and yet kept her distinct. The note of her small but clear personality is never hushed in that Bath turmoil in which Isabella shrills and John

Thorpe bellows. Isabella and John may silence Catherine, but her very silences are audible. There is little to Catherine perhaps, but what there is is firm. You may call her a particle if you like, but the particle is a granule.

Henry Tilney is a dancing shape, an image gay; in other words, his humor is the best and biggest part of him. His virtues are unmistakable, but they efface themselves in the company of his spirits like obliging aunts and grandmammas in the presence of madcap juniors. Goldwin Smith finds him so like his clerical brother, Edmund Bertram, as to threaten the stability of Macaulay's famous observation on the unlikeness of Miss Austen's young divines. To my thought he resembles Edmund Bertram about as much as tomato salad resembles peach marmalade. His gayeties and railleries are not definitively clerical, and in this point he reminds one of Mr. Breckon, Mr. Howells's young Unitarian pastor in the *Kentons*. Mr. Breckon paid his calling the deference of an occasional doubt as to whether a person so jovial and quizzical as himself was qualified to lead his fellow-men in worship. No such doubt visits the mind of Mr. Tilney. The clerical profession in Miss Austen's day appears never to have pestered its votaries with any scruple as to their qualifications; in fact it gave little trouble of any sort. Its unobtrusiveness was quite endearing.

I confess that I am drawn to a young man who can

make much of a young girl in the very act of making fun of her; the combination is sound. Henry's treatment of Catherine, if free in appearance, is really delicate. Perhaps amusement and condescension pass a little too speedily into love; if the growth of his affection is too slow to keep pace with Catherine's, it is quite swift enough to outrun nature. One of the capital points in which Miss Austen flouts the romantic tradition is conveyed in the following words: "I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude; or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought." On this point Miss Austen's courage is delightful, and there is no doubt that in principle she is entirely correct. The only adverse comment on the specific case is that gratitude is among the most fragile of human traits, and it is difficult to conceive that a plank so slender should adequately bridge a chasm so broad as that which divides the *minds* at least of Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney. Miss Austen crows over the insulted romanticist in making Henry Tilney love Catherine Morland because she loved him. But does not romanticism turn the tables on Miss Austen when she arranges a match between so ill-matched a young couple with an appended guarantee of lasting happiness? Catherine's strong points are youth and artlessness, and both these qualities have a reckoning to make with time.

Gratitude is a shortlived passion. Can we trust the longevity of a love which is its offspring?

Of Henry Tilney's relatives little need be said. The general is an ogre quite unfit to be the father of the young prince in a modern fairy tale, and conducts himself with a blind folly from which even the possession of a single eye should have protected him. He qualifies himself equally for the straitjacket and the halter. Elinor Tilney is little more than a suave excuse for the approximation of Henry and Catherine.

The Bath party cannot be quite so brusquely dismissed. Mrs. Allen, whom Miss Austen despatches in a few cavalier strokes of brilliant exaggeration, is perhaps as good a portrayal of pure inanity as the history of literature can supply. The creation of Mrs. Allen points to a momentary suspension in Nature's proverbial abhorrence of a vacuum. She undertakes the duties of a chaperon with that cheerfulness which is the outgrowth of a complete indifference to their fulfilment. She is the most amiable and the most selfish of human beings, and human nature is of course both shamefully maligned and tinglingly enlivened in the mere tip or extremity of itself which it sees reproduced in the unequalled Mrs. Allen. The odd thing—the all but impossible thing outside of Miss Austen—is that inanity should be clean-cut. Even emptiness for Miss Austen is not vague. If she drew a zero, she would give it angles.

Miss Austen's treatment of the redoubtable Isabella Thorpe may be said to have found a model in the dash and smartness of Isabella herself. On the surface this young lady is all modesty, sensibility, devotion. Inwardly, she is heartless, impudent, perfidious. Hypocrisy is inevitable, and it is the fashion of this hypocrisy that imparts to Miss Austen's treatment its rare vivacity and its real unsoundness. Isabella Thorpe is fool as well as hypocrite, and, at the very moment when her hypocrisy is covering her meanness, her folly is drawing away the screen from her meanness and her hypocrisy alike. Her rule is to say one thing and within the space of five minutes to do or say something that is in open and violent contradiction to the initial speech. The rawness of this method is incontestable. Even a fool would avoid the constant recurrence of these obvious clashes, and Isabella's excuses show an agility which ought to have fitted her to evade the continual necessity of evasion. It is Miss Austen's way to bestow great alertness on persons to whom she peremptorily refuses an atom of sense.

In view of the widespread belief in the delicacy of Miss Austen's craftsmanship—a belief which is as beautifully justified by a part of her work as it is refuted and mocked by another—I shall clarify my point a little further by contrasting Isabella with Hialmar Ekdal in Ibsen's *Wild Duck*. Hialmar, like Isabella, is a sentimental hypocrite, masking selfish-

ness and heartlessness under professions of tenderness and magnanimity. Ibsen's portrayal, though very forcible, is not remarkably delicate; it scores too constantly against Hialmar to maintain an agreement with reality. But in comparison with Miss Austen's Isabella, Ibsen's not over-scrupulous portrait is delicacy itself. Hialmar, like Isabella, falls into open self-contradiction. The beer which his plaintiveness has refused is accepted in the next second by his magnanimity, and his semi-abstraction consumes the bread-and-butter which his self-respect had imperiously declined. But in a very long and minute portrayal this unsoftened self-reversal occurs only a very few times. Other means are freely used for bringing out the weakness of the character; there are even times, though never long times, in which the exposure of its littleness is suspended. Miss Austen's method is as monotonous as the character she draws is unshaded. It is only fair to the Englishwoman to repeat that she has not failed to attain the vivacity to which temperance and truth have been so ruthlessly sacrificed. Those who smarten up reality have their reward, and the reward in Miss Austen's Isabella is considerable.

The last character that demands attention is John Thorpe. What will Jane Austen do with such a character? That a keen woman should succeed with a young springal and prodigal like Tom Bertram, that she should succeed with unbending and power-

ful masculinity in Mr. Knightley, need not surprise us overmuch. But what will the sheltered and circumspect spinster, the young girl born and bred in an English vicarage, make of a sheer blackguard mildly qualified with dunce and booby? The answer is that the success is extraordinary. John Thorpe is drawn with absolute clearness, with great apparent accuracy, and with a hidden zest from which a cynic might infer that the horror women feel for insolence and rudeness is often only an inverted sympathy. If Sheridan had dramatized *Northanger Abbey* for Drury Lane, I doubt if he would have found it necessary to add one coarsening or one enlivening touch to the demure novelist's portrayal of this loud-mouthed and bullying young Englishman. In saying this I concede that the picture is highly charged, but the excess, if I may be indulged in the paradox, is not excessive. What is excess from the point of view of the painstaking and conscientious historian may be moderation from the point of view of the painstaking and conscientious artist. The cases of John and Isabella are essentially different. Isabella is disclosed by an obvious artifice, by assigning permanence to what in the real world is merely occasional. But loudness and impudence are capable of indefinite prolongation even in life itself, and Miss Austen has done nothing more than magnify the truth without altering its quality.

CHAPTER IV

MANSFIELD PARK

In *Mansfield Park* there is a concentration which contrasts pleasantly with the width and diversity which give the character of polypi to *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*. *Mansfield Park* is frame as well as title; for most of the book the fixture of the story at the Park seems as unchangeable as that of Lady Bertram herself, and the removal of the tale to Portsmouth, with the other baggage of Fanny Price, surprises us almost to the point of dismay. We had grown so used to acres and turbot. Again, the characters in the novel are relatively few, and form what may be called a closed circuit. The effect of cushioned and curtained privacy is highly marked, and the social animation, the provision of which throughout the tale is rather liberal, adds, as it were, the sparkle of firelight to this shielded and luxurious tranquillity. At this point, however, we face one of the baffling paradoxes of the book. The material enclosure seems to imply, almost to require, a corresponding moral intimacy, but the people whom Mansfield Park secludes and embosoms are not intimate, are scarcely even familiar. Between the two sisters, no sympathy;

between the two brothers, no sympathy; between brothers and sisters, no sympathy. Between parents and children the case is hardly better: the father sits on a dais; the mother lies on a sofa. The sugared relations between Edmund and Fanny are agreeable enough in their studied way, but they neither compensate nor console us for the want of ease, of flexibility, in the propinquities of this divergent family. The leopardlike presence of the sinuous and faintly sinister Crawfords adds its modicum to the curious unrest, the sense of distance in proximity, of peril in an asylum, which follows the reader throughout this reassuring and disquieting tale.

Mrs. Price, wife of an indigent lieutenant of marines in Portsmouth and Lady Bertram, a rich baronet's lady in Northamptonshire, are sisters. The baronet's family offer to adopt Mrs. Price's eldest daughter, Fanny, and the hardships of rearing a large family on a small income are revealed in the promptitude of Mrs. Price's grateful acceptance. Transferred to Mansfield Park, the ten-year-old girl grows up with the marvellous rapidity with which that operation—so tedious in real life—is accomplished by the heroines of fiction. Fanny has made haste to qualify herself for the part of heroine by forming an almost instant, ardent, and constant attachment for her cousin, Edmund Bertram, the only young person in the house for whom benevolence to a penniless cousin can take a brighter shape than

amused or condescending toleration. With the engagement of Maria Bertram to a neighboring magnate, Mr. Rushworth, a transaction in which the young lady's heart is suavely neutral, and with the installation at the rectory of Henry and Mary Crawford, brother and sister of the rector's wife, the story is, in the sturdy parlance of the American street, "open for business."

An attraction speedily grows up between Edmund Bertram, who is destined for the church, and Mary Crawford, in whom a fondness for deriding clergymen is not the only symptom of worldliness. Miss Austen is adept in the accumulation of evidence, but in the evocation of moral or psychical process she has little skill, and the relation between Edmund and Mary is kept almost at a standstill, without engagement or unmistakable declaration, till very close to the end of the novel. There is affection and misgiving on both sides. If, to appropriate the language of Bishop Blougram, on Edmund Bertram's part it is a life "of faith diversified by doubt," on Mary Crawford's it is a "life of doubt diversified by faith." While in this quarter matters assume what we might describe as permanence in instability, Henry Crawford, after exhausting the piquancy of alternate courtship of the two Misses Bertram, centres his assiduities on Maria. A visit of the Mansfield party to Mr. Rushworth's place and the undertaking of an amateur play at Mansfield itself are friendly to

Mr. Crawford's success in this cruel and ignoble enterprise.

To Miss Austen they are no less friendly than to Mr. Crawford. In scenes half social, half domestic, where the characters are many, the setting compact, the regroupings facile, and the openings for minute but intimate and zestful diplomacy pretty frequent, her spirits rise and her art brightens, and the trip and play chapters must be classed with the signal enlivenments of the book. That Mr. Rushworth is a nullity for Maria and Maria herself is a nullity for the reader, that it is hard to tell whether her detachment from her brainless suitor is to be viewed as ruin or salvation, are drawbacks which are swept aside, for the time being at least, by the alacrity and momentum of the narrative. That Miss Austen's condemnation of the theatricals is unqualified does not prevent her from portraying them with that gusto which, in an impish world, is so often the associate of disapproval. A careful American parent would find no fault with the securities for propriety and innocence which accompany the rehearsals of the play. There is no audience, no professional man except a scene-painter, no actors from outside except a guest staying in the house and the brother and sister of the parish rector's wife; the mother of the family is informed, consenting, and on the spot. For all that, Miss Austen, who has a taste for wine, indulgence for cards, and approbation

for balls, and who had seen her own kinsfolk taking part in private theatricals in her father's barn, is inexorable in her reprobation of the sport. Her mingled zest and horror remind one a little of the comment of the maiden aunt, Franziska, in Sudermann's *Heimat*, on learning that her operatic niece drank a mixture of coffee and chocolate, "Horrible—but it must be good."

On the arrival of Sir Thomas Bertram from Antigua, the theatricals dissolve—the word is exact—and Henry Crawford rides away to Bath. The brusqueness of his treatment of Maria seems almost copied by Miss Austen in her cavalier desertion of an affair with which she has lingeringly and solicitously dallied. The train so heedfully laid is not touched off, and the novelist, who is as unfeeling toward Maria as Henry himself, despatches her "agony" in a summary paragraph. Maria bears her loss with a fortitude which culminates in her marriage with Mr. Rushworth.

The story has now reached a halting-place. (It must be understood that all this time the Edmund-Mary affair has been going on or, better, standing still, or better yet, has attained a combination of going on and standing still by simply oscillating.) Miss Austen has no sooner despatched Henry Crawford to Bath than she discovers that she has the most urgent occupation for him at Mansfield. That occupation is the courtship of Fanny Price. This

move is disconcerting to the reader. If there is no positive answer to the question, "Why should not Henry Crawford fall in love with Fanny Price?" there is likewise no positive answer to the question, "Why should he fall in love with her?"; and the absence of an answer to the second question is in effect an answer to the first. When a certain point in novels has been reached, all new events should have traceable pedigrees; and this movement of Crawford's resembles the Merlin of the older Arthurian tales in being a child without a father. It might be defined with equal accuracy as a father without a child. It is the main business, if not the major interest, of the remainder of the book, yet its removal in a block from the tale would not alter the conclusion by a line. Indeed, its effect is worse than neutral; it is a hindrance to the conclusion. It forces Miss Austen into at least the seeming improbability of allowing a man to elope with a married woman whom he does not love to the certain ruin of his not uncheerful prospects with the woman whom he loves sincerely. What, then, is the motive for the episode? Miss Austen designs a testimonial to Fanny on the grand scale, but the reader has two difficulties. The grandeur of the scale is not wholly clear, at least to a man who does not share Miss Austen's womanly sense of the immeasurable importance of wicked charmers; and, in the second place, he finds it hard to triumph for Fanny in the

very circumstances in which he is called upon to suffer with her.

Crawford conducts his suit with that mixture of acuteness and stupidity which marks the abler and coarser mind in its dealings with the simpler and finer one. In the strategy of his assault, I am more sensible of Miss Austen's cleverness than of faithfulness in the report of actuality; the abatement of prejudice on Fanny's side is handled with delicate and authentic insight, and Miss Austen comes closer to emotional process in this episode than in any other place in her works which I recall. The caution of the novelist arrests the process in its nonage, almost in its infancy; it never reaches a stage which imperils either Fanny's heart or Edmund's prospects.

The outcome of the novel is rather skilfully manœuvred. A double suspense has been created with regard to Edmund Bertram's courtship of Mary Crawford and Henry Crawford's pursuit of Fanny Price. A stroke of masterly contrivance enables one event to furnish a solution for both these problems. Crawford elopes with Maria Rushworth—Maria who has been kept so long in the background that she has almost the effect of being resuscitated for the commission of this enormity. Crawford's prospects with Fanny are destroyed, and Edmund's hopes of Mary are equally shipwrecked by the worldliness and levity of mind revealed in Mary's comments on the scandal.

Miss Austen, however, makes a mistake in the remoteness and chariness of her handling of the elopement, which is not only the mainspring of her two dénoûments, but the event to which the preparations in the first half of the book look forward with unswerving constancy. Miss Austen recoils from her own crises. She resembles those persons whom Max Piccolomini in the first act of *Wallenstein* described as calling up a spectre in their need, and shrinking away from it the instant it reveals itself. She says plainly: "Let other pens dwell on grief and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can." To which the answer is very simple: If you object to dogs, you should not rear puppies. For dogs at a polite distance, in a judicious half-light, Miss Austen appears to have a real partiality. At all events, at the very moment Maria Rushworth is eloping with Crawford, Julia Bertram is eloping with Mr. Yates, though in this latter case nothing worse than a clandestine marriage is the outcome of the adventure. This is rather too much; the reader raises a protesting eyebrow. Maria, yes; some sort of black lamb was doubtless owed to Hecate. But why Julia? Julia was entitled to the shelter of insignificance.

I have thus far slighted an element in the tale which protests rather loudly against omission. In the last half of the book Fanny spends several weeks at her parents' house in Portsmouth. The reason for

this visit is peculiar. Sir Thomas Bertram, anxious to reconcile his niece to the desirable match with the wealthy Henry Crawford, resolves that she shall learn the value of riches by a brief but drastic experience of the hardships of poverty. In this reasoning Sir Thomas is hopeful rather than lucid. Fanny's alternative is not Crawford or Portsmouth, but Crawford or Mansfield. Portsmouth was in every way qualified to teach her the superiority of comfort to poverty. But the only thing that it can be in the least profitable to teach her is the superiority of opulence to comfort, and her mother's house is the last place in which that not indisputable thesis could be verified. The Portsmouth chapters have been warmly praised, and there can be no question that the exactness of their particulars is impressive. I cannot, however, rank them with Miss Austen's very best work, because, if I may trust my instinct, while they have exactness, they lack pliancy; I miss the ease and suppleness of life. If Miss Austen is ever like Gissing—and I should think twice before affirming that she was—she is like him in this Portsmouth interlude. It is all schooling, all exhibit; every one of its clean-cut particulars is tilted at the precise angle at which the admonition to Fanny is unmistakable. This accumulation of salutary warnings to a recalcitrant young person who finally rejects them all and prospers in her contumacy impresses the reader as uncalled for.

Mansfield Park is a combination of two genera: it is a biography, the biography of Fanny Price, and it is a novel, the novel, roughly speaking, of the Bertrams and the Crawfords. Now biography, even in the most artistic hands, is congenitally loose, and Miss Austen, though skilful, is not punctiliously skilful. Naturally enough, she has not succeeded in tucking all the loose ends and ravellings of the biography into the compact parcel of the novel. For example, Mrs. Norris's services to the plot are virtually over after the first few chapters in which her mendicant benevolence—it deserves no better phrase—brings Fanny Price to Mansfield. After that she is installed as a permanent incumbrance in the biography, while her relation to the novel is merely that of spectator or invader. The conclusion of the work is evidently hurried. Miss Austen has even the barbarity to withhold from the reader the sight of the final mutual confession of Edmund and Fanny.

The moral or morals of *Mansfield Park* are doubtless sound enough, but I do not feel that they are powerfully or skilfully enforced. In Chapter 48, almost at the end of the book, there is a formal and solemn exposition of the errors in the training of the two Misses Bertram. The passage reads like an afterthought. Until I came to these paragraphs, in which the elders are loaded with the misconduct of the children, I own that I had failed to realize that

the rearing of the Misses Bertram had been vicious, and was obliged to run hastily through the book to discover if Miss Austen or myself had failed in vigilance. My diligence was rewarded with one short paragraph in which a hint of unwisdom was unmistakably lodged, but I was harsh enough to feel that the need of research to obtain this information was almost as sharp a criticism on the novelist as the failure of research to obtain it would have been. Authors, like other parents, sometimes discover too late their oversights in the early treatment of their children. After all, it is hard to see anything in the bringing-up of these girls which would account for Maria's desertion of her husband and elopement with a gallant. They had a sensible father, a harmless, if helpless, mother, and an injudiciously flattering aunt. To assert that vice is the logical outcome of these conditions is to magnify unduly the ascendency of aunts.

A similar warning against the evil fruits of unwholesome training is clearly intended in the case of the two Crawfords. But a relation between training and its consequences cannot be made effective in a book in which the training is not presented, or is presented only in a few passing words of hurried retrospect. The evils of parental folly may be again suggested in the picture of the slatternly Price household, but if, in the Crawford matter we have the conclusion without the premises, in the Price affair

we have the premises without the conclusion. On the whole, we cannot but feel that the lessons of *Mansfield Park*, though doubtless far from insincere, were somewhat adventitious. Miss Austen probably made the confection to please the sprightly, and later discovered its virtue as cough medicine in order to placate the discreet.

Mansfield Park is Fanny Price's book; indeed its faithfulness to Fanny is almost canine. It is a technical flaw perhaps that a book which scarcely leaves Fanny's side should admit a brief dialogue here and there from which she is shut out. I mind this very little, however, because I think that no *disapproval* which arises in the critical re-survey of a book matters much except as the sequel of a *displeasure* in the original uncritical reading. In point of fact, I read the book without the slightest perturbation from this error in consistency, and even now I am not sure that Miss Austen would not have done well to part from Fanny oftener and more freely. The love-affair between Edmund and Mary Crawford is seen only in parcels and through slits, because it is seen only through the eyes and ears of Fanny Price.

Fanny herself interests and attracts us, though we yield to her charm with a shade of reluctance and a measure of reserve. Her position as the poor dependent in the great house is as advantageous for heroineship as it is undesirable in reality. She is by

no means the pining and whining orphan of nursery fiction; she is fairly well treated at Mansfield, though she lives at her uncle's on a curiously mixed footing which permits her the luxury of a horse and denies her the comfort of a fire. Her virtue is a little formidable even in a heroine from whom we have learned to expect no moderation or self-restraint in that particular. Fanny does not allow our admiration the breathing-space which the commission of a single fault in the course of well-nigh three hundred pages would afford. She is permitted to dislike only those persons whom it is permissible, even laudable, to dislike. For her offenses in this kind she has the excuse of youth and inexperience.

This very excuse, however, becomes the source of another difficulty. Fanny, at the time when we see most of her, is eighteen, absolutely ignorant of the world, shrinking and docile to an appealing, almost a pathetic, degree. But her mind is about twenty years older than her physique or her character. She is set down in the Mansfield Park circle as Miss Austen's delegate and mouthpiece. She observes with Miss Austen's keenness, and condemns with Miss Austen's severity. We are disconcerted by the hardihood with which this fragile and trembling girl holds out in her own mind against the judgment of the very persons who, so far as we can see, are responsible for the formation of her judgment. Literature has not hesitated to combine the mildest

and sweetest of dispositions with perfect clearness of head and unbending precision of verdict. Hilda, in the *Marble Faun*, is a case in point, but Hilda, a solitary American girl in Rome, is predestined by her very part to unhesitating self-reliance. But Fanny has never left her dovecote or rookery. If, in the Emersonian phrase, she had a Delphi in her own breast, the case might be altered; but Fanny is quite innocent of any such appanage; her opinions are formed by that society in which the people she condemns are judges and leaders.

We like to associate keen judgment with active force, and Miss Austen has done Fanny an ill turn by transporting her to her mother's house in Portsmouth, where her want of practical efficiency receives a peculiar—almost a sardonic—emphasis. In the squalors of that riotous household Fanny, apart from her encouragement of Susan, can do nothing but lose her appetite and her color, retreat into herself, and pine for Mansfield. In one way, all this is right and shrewd. The nursling of the aristocratic leisure in which Fanny has been dandled would no doubt have been powerless to cope with the grimy situation at the Prices', and the reader who dreams of an Esther Summerson, shepherding a meek flock of renovated Jellybys, must not be peevish at the snub to his romanticism. There is, however, something narrow and mean in viewing these young and old ne'er-do-weels solely in relation to their success or

failure in conciliating the taste of Mansfield, and I fear that Miss Austen can hardly be acquitted of complicity in the littleness and egotism of this view. What is Miss Austen's expedient for helping the child of a drunken father and a slipshod mother? Apparently she has nothing to suggest but adoption into a rich family. When told that the French poor had no bread, Marie Antoinette is said to have replied: "Why, then, let them eat cake." I have no doubt that Miss Austen would have been duly amused at the artlessness or heartlessness of the young queen's reply.

There is another trait in Fanny which, if hardly to be classed as a fault, is, in my own case at least, a bar to enjoyment. About half the time Fanny is in a state of fright, or at least of flutter. She is like Spenser's almond-tree on Mount Selinus,

> Whose tender locks do tremble every one
> At every little breath, that under heaven is blown.

Further, this fright can never be taken for granted and pushed aside; it must always be recounted with care, with detail, with affectionate and solicitous assiduity. We all think that Miss Austen's mind was strong, if matched with Miss Burney's, and herculean in comparison with Mrs. Radcliffe's; but not Evelina in the novel she names, not Emily in the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, is more fondled and cosseted on the score of nervousness than Fanny under the

wing of the robust authoress of *Mansfield Park*. The trait had for the novelists of that day all the holiness of a convention, a convention to which the martial and feudal Scott did not hesitate to subscribe in the portrayal of his heroines. But Scott had at least the excuse of giving his heroines something to be frightened about, and the emotion in its alternation with joy and love had for the heart the romantic charm which the eye felt in the passage of blush and pallor across the maiden's face. Miss Austen, as a realist, profits less by these excuses, and her constant presentation of the trait as an elegance is at war with the modern reader's indignant refusal to view the matter in that light. Fanny's charm, moreover, lies largely in the orderliness, the thrift and neatness of her compact and shapely little mind, and to this charm flutter is adverse.

Fanny remains, after all deductions, a kind and good girl whose fortunes and feelings one can follow with sincere, if somewhat patronizing, sympathy. Miss Austen reveals some of her most delicate psychology in the strokes of nature that now and then rise like bubbles to the smooth surface of Fanny's impeccable decorum. Miss Austen's infinite respect for very good little girls cannot always blind her shrewdness to the fact that they are human beings like the rest of us.

I now pass to Fanny's relatives at Mansfield Park. They are, first of all, an imaginable family, differing

in that respect from the Bennets, who are only a parcel loosely knotted together by an hereditary string. Sir Thomas Bertram does not rank in interest or power with Miss Austen's prime successes, but in one point he is a capital illustration of the delicacy of her workmanship. To split a character in two, and make it half ridiculous, half estimable or lovable, is a feat to which the dexterity of artists has long accustomed us. But to split a man's dignity in two, and make one-half ridiculous and the other half estimable is a rarer and subtler, though not necessarily a more valuable, accomplishment. Sir Thomas is a worthy and a stilted man; he is to be exposed and vindicated at the same time, and the instrument of his exposure and vindication alike is the fashion of his speech. That speech involves a great deal of the "mild majesty and sober pomp" which Burke praised in the Anglican ritual. It is pleasant to see the cunning with which Miss Austen protects Sir Thomas in the very act of demolishing his defenses. Her sense of the mixture in things is finely evinced in the art which allows Sir Thomas to be indignant with the household for refusing a fire to Fanny at the precise moment when he is himself angry with her for rejecting a desirable suitor.

Miss Austen's hand is consummate in the tiny portraiture of Lady Bertram. Even the initial strokes are final. She is done perfectly, and done

all at once. Continuance adds nothing to clearness, though it adds much to pleasure. In Lady Bertram, fortunately, there is very little of that pyrotechnic quality which exaggeration sometimes confers on Miss Austen's instant and vigorous effects. She is one of those woolly characters who roll themselves into balls, make themselves their own wrappage, as it were, and offer the minimum of exposure to the incursions of a teasing world. If her selfishness is unlimited, equally unlimited is her good-nature. Such beings, if happy, may be real alleviations of the inclemency of life for other people. A cat, the most selfish of animals, is sometimes the most agreeable of companions through the warmth shed abroad by its complete success in ministering to its own welfare. We half despise, half envy, the disposition for which comfort is pleasure. In her abandonment of responsibility in her mature life, Lady Bertram is not unlike two married women of contemporary fiction, the Mrs. Gaylord of Mr. Howells's *Modern Instance* and the Mrs. Folyat of Mr. Cannan's *Round the Corner*.

Tom Bertram is drawn with a free and light but fortunate touch. Miss Austen likes him pretty well without minding him very much, and this is a frame of mind that is favorable rather than otherwise to success in portraiture. His type is much commoner in the English novel in general than in Miss Austen's corner of the field. She favors either the brilliant

and plausible scapegrace, the Wickham, Willoughby, or Churchill type, or the mild and discreet young men, the Ferrarses, Bingleys, and Edmund Bertrams. Tom Bertram is of the type prefigured in the Tom Jones of Fielding and carried forward in the Tom Brown of Mr. Hughes's Rugby, and stands about midway between his two namesakes in point of time and rakishness. A single sentence will show the discretion with which Miss Austen portrays a character which the ordinary novelist is tempted to fondle or buffet. "Tom listened with some shame and some sorrow; but escaping as quickly as possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect, firstly, that he had not been half so much in debt as some of his friends; secondly, that his father had made a most tiresome piece of work of it; and thirdly, that the future incumbent, whoever he might be, would, in all probability, die very soon." One of those sicknesses which flourish in the third volumes of novels, with a view to the inducement of repentance in the hero or relenting in the heroine, waylays Tom Bertram; a moral convalescence accompanies the physical, which Miss Austen, whose respect for truth is highly variable, prolongs beyond the date of recovery. It may be added that Tom's brusque and hearty unconcern is perfectly evident and pleasantly evident through the shapely and decorous periods in which he confesses his filiation to Sir Thomas and to Jane Austen. Scott faced and mastered a similar

difficulty in his delineation of George Robertson in the *Heart of Mid-Lothian.*

There is a curious likeness and interesting difference between Sir Thomas Bertram and his younger son Edmund. Sir Thomas is something of a prig; Miss Austen knows it, likes him in spite of it, and succeeds in conveying both the knowledge and the liking to the reader. Edmund is a worse prig than Sir Thomas, but Miss Austen draws him under the impression that she is drawing nothing worse than an agreeable and exemplary young man, and the reader feels the full virus of the priggishness. Edmund is once—just once—allowed to do wrong. He consents to take part in an amateur theatrical performance to be given in his father's house among brothers and sisters and two or three intimate friends. I wish to give Edmund due credit for this solitary misdemeanor, but I feel bound to point out that a single act, however iniquitous, cannot redeem a long career of hardened and unblushing virtue to which even the excuse of thoughtlessness is wanting.

Edmund is a worshipper of decency, and religion which is a part of decency and indeed the prime decency, has a claim to his unqualified respect. He is shocked with Mary Crawford for letting him see that her real objection to the Crawford-Rushworth elopement is the damage to respectability. One suspects that this is the real trouble with Edmund himself, but to avow it as the real trouble is the

opposite of respectable. There are situations where respectability makes a point of subordinating its own claims, where it shocks all the conventions to give primacy to the conventional shock. We like Edmund's kindness to Fanny, and we do not feel that Fanny's virtues are rated too high in the award of Edmund as their recompense. As a husband his kindness will be unvarying, and he will treat Fanny with a condescension so delicate that both he and Fanny will mistake it for respect.

Of the two Misses Bertram very little is made. Julia, the younger sister, is clear, though slight, and the slightness is hardly a fault in a story in which Julia's position is obviously secondary. But Maria's case is very different. Maria is a mainstay of the plot, and why should Maria be grudged the boon of individualization in the Austen temple where even the small pillars are caryatids? The reason is quite dark to me. Maria is cheap ware certainly, but Miss Austen's interest is not confined to porcelain.

Mrs. Norris, Lady Bertram's sister, is the outstanding figure of the book. Goldwin Smith says of her: "Short of criminality, nothing can be more odious; nor has Jane Austen painted anything which we should say was more worthy of hatred. Mrs. Norris is harsh, ill-natured, mean, and artful. Her mind is thoroughly low. . . . Yet what character is dearer to us than Mrs. Norris? What would even *Mansfield Park* be without her? It is to the

bad characters in novels and plays that we are indebted after all for the excitement and the fun." My own feeling about Mrs. Norris is more closely approximated in Henry James's comment on another famous exemplar of acrimony and bullying, the Mrs. Proudie of Trollope's Barsetshire series. "She is exceedingly true; but I do not think she is quite so good as her fame, or as several figures from the same hand that have not won so much honour. She is rather too violent, too vixenish, too sour." For me Mrs. Norris is loud herself, and Miss Austen's portrayal of her is simply boisterous. Nowhere has Miss Austen's hand been more brilliant or incisive; nowhere has it been more unbridled in the neglect of shading and the disdain of moderation.

Mrs. Norris, like Lady Bertram, belongs to what might be called the single-stroke type of character. She is shrewish and she is stingy, and the delineation consists of little else than the defiling past the reader's mind of successive illustrations of these major traits. Mrs. Norris has been cited in proof of the alleged complexity of Miss Austen's delineations, but I think she offers no ground for serious discomfort to supporters of the thesis that Miss Austen is anything but complex. Besides the parsimony and the acrimony we are invited to contemplate her flattery of the young Misses Bertram, but this flattery, of which we have only one marked exhibition in a very early chapter, never dominates or

permeates the drawing. Indeed, it has rather the effect of being provided by a charitable afterthought as a crutch for a tardy and tottering moral. Perhaps I am a little ill-natured in quarrelling with the strokes for falling so uniformly into two groups when almost every stroke *qua* stroke is masterly. Fortunately for herself, Miss Austen, who excels in the concrete and delights in the abstract, is forced, in one side of the presentation of Mrs. Norris, to forego her preference and exercise her faculty. Love, hate, wrath, and shame may promenade in the abstract, but frugality positively refuses to renounce its adhesion to the concrete. If you save, you must save green baize or shirt-buttons or their equivalent.

I admire the portrait, but I cannot exult in its merits in the unreserved fashion of the ordinarily temperate Goldwin Smith. The picture tries me almost as much as it exhilarates. I feel that a criticism which Scott in his review applied, and, on the whole misapplied, to the Miss Bates and Mr. Woodhouse of *Emma* is unassailable in relation to Mrs. Norris. The criticism may be restated thus: there is a class of portraits in which the material repels faster than the treatment can attract. In the mimicry of a bagpipe it is conceivable that inaccuracy or inadequacy might be a blessing. I know that the uglinesses of art, like the distresses of love, are sectors in a circle of which delight is the circumference; yet even the salubrity of art acts but feebly

on the asperity of Mrs. Norris. The laceration of Fanny is the less forgivable because the service to the plot is simply zero. We suffer keenly with Cosette in the claws of the Thenardiess in Hugo's *Les Misérables*, but we suffer stoutly, because this barbarity is of the very grain and tissue of a story to which our hearts are joyously and unreservedly committed. But, after the first chapter, the footing of Mrs. Norris in the Mansfield Park story exactly coincides with her position in the Mansfield Park household; she is a tolerated superfluity.

Miss Austen has kept some of the slyest of her pungencies for the verbal chastisement of Mrs. Norris, but I have my doubts if the essence of the character be truly humorous. Humor is masquerade, and the parsimony and acerbity of Mrs. Norris hardly seek the protection of a mask. At times, indeed, the meanness is altogether too barefaced. I quote a paragraph.

> While Fanny's mind was engaged in these sort of hopes, her uncle was, soon after tea, called out of the room; an occurrence too common to strike her, and she thought nothing of it till the butler re-appeared ten minutes afterwards, and advancing decidedly towards herself, said, "Sir Thomas wishes to speak with you, ma'am, in his own room." Then it occurred to her what might be going on; a suspicion rushed over her mind which drove the colour from her cheeks; but instantly rising, she was preparing to obey, when Mrs. Norris called out, "Stay, stay, Fanny! what are you about? where are you going? don't be in such a hurry. Depend upon it, it is not you who are wanted; depend upon it, it is me (looking at the butler) but you are so very eager to put

yourself forward. What should Sir Thomas want you for? It is me, Baddeley, you mean; I am coming this moment. You mean me, Baddeley, I am sure; Sir Thomas wants me, not Miss Price."

A master of a house often wishes to see a servant, and Fanny is a relative; Mrs. Norris's disbelief in the possibility of her being sent for is an insult to the reader's common sense. The instance is extreme, and most of Mrs. Norris's speeches and acts, taken singly, are credible enough. It is their reiteration and concentration that provides trials for the reader's faith. Miss Austen is not the historian, is not the judge; she is the prosecuting attorney whose business is not the probing of the truth, but the collection of incriminative evidence. One rebels and admires. Mrs. Norris pounds at Fanny, and Miss Austen pounds the reader with Mrs. Norris. The picture is as swashing as it is brilliant, and is no less a hardship than a joy.

The two Crawfords, brother and sister, are much alike both as persons and as portraits. The relation of Edmund to Mary is not wholly unlike that of Fanny to Henry. In each case the serious character feels both a charm and a danger in the worldly one. The same catastrophe, the elopement, puts an end to both uncertainties. Edmund's support of Crawford's suit is curiously parallel to Mary's countenance of Henry's. Neither brother nor sister occupies a front place in the Austen gallery. Each is more

than a failure, but each is less than a success, and in both cases the half-failure seems assignable to the same cause, to lacunæ in the portrayal, the absence of connective tissue.

The problem of the young woman of the world whose heart is drawn to a young clergyman is one of vigorous appeal. If one had to pick out a more penetrating problem, it would be that of the young clergyman whose heart is drawn to a woman of fashion. When these two first-rate situations face each other, the material becomes almost inestimable. In one respect the planning of Mary Crawford's character is worthy of this splendid opportunity. She is not a bad woman, not even a wholly frivolous woman. The difference between her and the wholly baleful influence is the difference between Calypso and Circe. On one occasion in the theatrical squabble, the author has made her truly kind to Fanny, not to mention the many occasions on which she is politely or politicly kind. She loves the world; she loves Edmund Bertram; her preference is hidden from herself. She is old enough to know the value of circumspection, and young enough to rejoice at times in throwing it off. She has principle enough to protest, though far from strongly, against her brother's plan to divert himself with Fanny.

Nevertheless, I must own to a feeling that I cannot get at Mary Crawford, and I have sometimes the temerity to think that Miss Austen shares my em-

barrassment. There are two marked difficulties; we are obliged to see her brokenly through Fanny Price's interrupted vision, and obliquely through Fanny Price's biased eyes. Her love for Edmund, its feature, its profile, is absolutely withheld from us, and even for the other side of her character we are obliged to depend on scattered hints and surface indications. Again, while the contiguity of the two elements in her personality has been finely and naturally conceived, I do not feel that their amalgamation has been brought to pass. The synthetic view by which dramatic elements are unified into a human being is not perceivable in the treatment of Mary Crawford. Miss Austen dislikes her, and while intent on controlling the dislike, is betrayed here and there into a flash of malice. One such flash is her reference to Tom Bertram's illness: "I never bribed a physician in my life." This is worse than cruel on Miss Austen's part; it is tactless. It does not take Miss Crawford out of nature, but it vulgarizes a worldliness whose interest lay largely in its delicacy.

In Henry Crawford the discerning endeavor to balance good and evil is equally noticeable, but the success is even more imperfect. Henry Crawford leaves ruin behind him, but even in power he lacks significance. He talks very freely, but his utterance is inexpressive. Don Juans as a class are tenuous, the sort of persons whom ghosts can discipline and statutes kill, and Crawford is an attenuated Don Juan.

At the close of the book he runs off with a woman whom he despises to the certain loss of the woman whom he really loves. We touch here on the powerful suggestion that the penalty of pursuing caprice at the expense of others' comfort and one's own conscience is the final sacrifice to this tinsel god of one's own profoundest and most passionate desires. Wilfulness thwarts our will. Striking as this reflection is, in *Mansfield Park* it is hardly more than a reflection, or indeed an implication. It remains on the verge of the story where its influence on the book is naturally slight. Crawford is the leisurely, the placid, the indolently supple ladykiller, the huntsman to whom the chase is more than the game, and his elegance in the saddle more than the chase. With Fanny his heart is touched, and alacrity is more apparent. I do not know whether Miss Austen is blind to the real insolence of the means he adopts in his pursuit of Fanny—means which reek with latent insult and which would settle his fate once for all with any spirited woman. I incline to think that Miss Austen views his wooing as refined and diplomatic. I think she erred in denying him personal beauty; the fear of the obvious has impaired, or at least imperilled, the naturalness of the portrait. A man whose mind and manners are only moderately winning could not safely dispense with the reënforcement of good looks.

The other characters are of small account. A

stroke or two makes Dr. Grant absolutely clear—clearer than his wife to whom many more strokes are less profitably devoted. The contents of Mr. Rushworth's mind are so meagre as hardly to furnish even the needful equipment for an adequate imbecile. At a distance he excites pity. William Price, the midshipman, is agreeable and unobtrusive; Susan is clinched in a few deft touches; and the other Prices, of whom Miss Austen is almost inhumanly contemptuous, are distinct enough in their clamor and squalor.

I may note, finally, that in *Mansfield Park* there is a partial disparity between the form—at least, the apparent form—of the book, and its contents. It purports or claims to be made after an ancient and approved recipe by which the tediums of generations have been salved. There is the nestling of poverty who becomes the nursling of wealth, the penniless girl brought up among the chilly bounties of rich relations. There is the handsome young heir (or cadet) by whom an instant and constant attachment is inspired. There is the wicked knight or amorous conjuror who uses all his arts to draw the young girl within the fated circle of his malign influence. There is, finally, the ogress (Mrs. Norris) who dogs the heroine's steps. This is the kind of tale to be read stretched out lazily upon the hearth-rug or doubled up in the cosiness of the sofa-corner (to read it in a chair is unpermissible), and the effect

of lamplighted and carpeted interiors in *Mansfield Park* fits in with these agreeable conditions. This is not quite the book that Miss Austen wrote, it is the book she feigned to write. The feint is not unskilful, and lovers of this particular brand of literary sweetmeat are not the persons whom deceivers find most troublesome. It is this cousinship with a more popular and insinuating type of fiction that helps to account for the appearance of its name seven times on the slips of paper with which, according to Goldwin Smith, a party of men of letters balloted for the novel affording the most pleasure.

I have very little faith in this "tradition," as Goldwin Smith himself circumspectly calls it, and I doubt if *Mansfield Park* has largely profited by the attempt to couch a serious study of life in the frame of a fairy tale. The frame is too slight, and its fragility must not be overstrained. The width of character congenial to Miss Austen is shut out, and Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris are the only characters in which the novelist rises to her full height. The elopement of Henry Crawford and Maria Rushworth in a story of this kind is like the firing of a pistol shot at an afternoon tea. The story, naturally enough, flees to the nearest hiding-place, crouches down, and puts its fingers in its ears. The fairy tale is a little too elemental or exotic for Miss Austen's free and robust hand. We feel that Edmund is overstarched, that Fanny is oversweetened, and

that the two Crawfords are unfortunate in their resemblance to unstable chemical compounds. The book has much that is valuable and attractive, but in soundness of plan, in fundamental health, it impresses me as notably inferior both to *Emma* and to *Pride and Prejudice*.

CHAPTER V

EMMA

THE claim of *Emma* to the second place among Miss Austen's novels seems to me as incontestable as its failure to compete with *Pride and Prejudice* for the honor of the first. *Emma*, the novel, has a quality of its own, a good-natured, placid, slightly, dispersed and unoccupied quality, which is pleasantly reflected in the character of its heroine. The atmosphere is sunny; the people are in the main healthy, prosperous, and cheerful; nobody, with the doubtful exception of the two Knightleys, has much to do; and the story resigns itself with the other inhabitants of Highbury to that poverty of incident and defect of bustle which is the price paid by small villagers for security and comfort.

The main bid for heart-throbs lies in a secret engagement, and though Miss Austen does her best to uphold its solemnity by speaking of it in the tone appropriate to a defalcation or a burglary, the reader declines to excite himself. Indeed, the opportunity to excite himself is not offered until three-fourths of the narrative is complete, for this is the point at which he is apprised of the occurrence. Meanwhile, he has contented himself with such amusement as

he could pick up by the way. Of what does this amusement consist? There is a semblance of a love-affair between Frank Churchill and Emma Woodhouse, but as the affair is pure imagination on the woman's part and pure simulation on the man's, and as both parties are warmly agreed on the expediency of its prompt consignment to the dustheap, its contribution to the life of the story is not great.

What more does the narrative offer? There is a young girl who is induced by a benevolent but shortsighted patroness to transfer her affections from a young farmer, who is her social equal and mental superior, to a young clergyman who airs his want of sense in a politer circle. The young clergyman proving ungrateful, nourishing indeed a most unseasonable passion for the patroness, the heart of the young girl is transferred, this time by its own volition, to a county landowner. The landowner remaining obdurately unconscious, the heart, which has been passed around like a photograph in a drawing-room, is returned with the strictest probity to its original possessor, the young farmer. This kind of chain-work will obviously awaken no great suspense, especially when we allow for the fact that the young girl is subsidiary and insignificant. The young clergyman, having been refused by the patroness, proceeds with vindictive celerity to court and marry another woman. This second woman's contribution to the plot is minute; it consists in

securing a place as governess for Jane Fairfax (the woman who is secretly engaged), which the said Jane, accepting one evening in an access of despair, cancels a few days later in a reflux of happiness. The clergyman's wife, irrelevant to the plot, is nevertheless invaluable to Jane Austen. The moment of her entrance is critical for the story. The first interest, that of the young clergyman's love-affairs, is definitively ended; the secret engagement which is to vivify the close is undiscerned as yet by any except the Dupins among the readers; something is clearly needed to keep the public from dozing. Now this clergyman's wife is a woman with rings on her fingers and bells on her toes (I speak partly in metaphor), and with the jingle of these trinkets she is deputed to amuse the reader in the slumber or suspension of the other interests. The expedient is not artful; but in the act of drowning one clutches at Mrs. Eltons as at other straws.

Meanwhile, a love-affair of a calm, slow, and uneventful type, disguising itself as a friendship when it is not masquerading as a feud, has established itself between the heroine and the landowner, and mutual avowals close the book. The novel as a whole is a curious medley in which there is a great deal of what passes for heart interest, handled with scant suspense and broken continuity. The reader is often constrained to wonder where the story is. He thinks of a picnic in which desultory groups of

persons dispose themselves at random, or pursue nominal objects with devious strolls and pointless rearrangements. The simile is instructive and yet unfair, because in work so clean-cut as Miss Austen's, observation becomes an end in itself, and the addition of fact to fact is significant irrespective of its bearing on an issue. The story does not loaf even when it lingers; loafing implies languor of movement as well as uncertainty of route, and Miss Austen's gait is never shuffling; even her route is rather various and devious than unsure.

It may be thought that Emma's blunders should supply a unifying principle for the book. But Emma's blunders are an odd lot; they are of all sorts and all sizes; they are sometimes rather undefined, and the degree of their harmfulness is sometimes difficult to measure. They have nothing like the symmetry and ordered neatness (nor, let us hasten to add, anything like the arrant artifice) of the blunders of Lélie in Molière's *Etourdi* or of Sir Martin Mar-all in Dryden's imitation of that comedy. Emma's capital error is her first—the fostering of Harriet's passion for Mr. Elton. By that step, if I may paraphrase the language of Macaulay on Marlborough's treachery, she put herself under the disadvantage which attends every great artist from the moment he has achieved a masterpiece; and, unlike Marlborough, Emma fails to cope successfully with this disadvantage. Her second

blunder in the same kind is far less flagrant, and the recuperative powers of Harriet's heart do not strengthen our sense of the wickedness of Emma. With one exception, her other follies amount to little. Her flirtation with Frank Churchill is hardly more than an excusable imprudence, and her levities at Box Hill are a relatively innocent part of a complex general situation of which a rupture of the engagement between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax is the momentary outcome. On the other hand, her really unpardonable conduct in the Dixon matter is productive of no evil beyond a passing embarrassment. It is quite true that Emma's experience is no more unequal or unsorted than the normal course of life, but life is not a novel and the entertainment of spectators is not the object of its march.

It is regrettable that the mistake of Elinor Dashwood and Mrs. Jennings as to the identity of the person of whom they talk is repeated with equal extravagance and rather less excuse in the conversation of Harriet and Emma in the fortieth chapter.

Emma Woodhouse is a finely drawn character. She is not lovable, she is not winning; but she is vastly likable. She is one of those persons whose vicinity is wholesome; her presence is more exciting than her conversation, which seems merely episodic to her presence. She does nothing but blunder, and the effect of this succession of blunders is the instilment of an unshakable trust. The truth

is that Emma's consciousness at this stage of her life is the antipodes of her temperament; what she thinks and feels belies what she is. Her thinking and feeling is for the most part frivolous and silly; but the essential things in her are bottom and poise. She has that firm-based British nature, that rounded —I am almost moved to say that mounded—temperament which shows itself in such diverse forms and to such varied purpose in Scott's Jeanie Deans, in Hardy's Tess Durbeyfield, and in George Eliot's Mary Garth.

She is handsome, clever, and rich, and she suffers from the *malaise* of having nothing to do. She has too many servants to permit her to work, and too few dependents to exercise her charity. The care of an invalid father to whom she is devoted furnishes her with just that degree of occupation which makes the absence of voluntary tasks forgivable. She has no religion to speak of, no zeal in the pursuit of study, no serious intellectual interest. The social activity in the populous village of Highbury is meagre and casual. She has indefinite leisure and an untilled mind. A mind capable of seriousness, but not capable of finding its own occasions for seriousness, has drifted into levity through defect of schooling and excess of freedom. Only a fraction of her nature is in play; she is the owner of a chateau who lives in a marquee.

Emma's love for Mr. Knightley is the natural and

salutary demand of her tentative nature for certainty and authority. She has no explicit principles; it has never occurred to her that a person of such admirable dispositions as herself could stand in need of principles. One doesn't muzzle a lamb. Unfortunately, the most admirable of dispositions, if unsecured by principles, are in themselves no security against acts the most contrary to their own tendencies. The good-natured and generous Emma confides to Frank Churchill her meddlesome and ill-bred conjectures on the relations of Jane Fairfax to Mr. Dixon. Conduct of this kind is a trial—not to say an ordeal—for the sympathetic reader, but our kindness for Emma has something of the stability and amplitude of Emma herself. I use amplitude here in a moral sense, though there is a quality, including both mind and person, which tempts me to use, and yet will not quite permit me to use, the adjective buxom.

Mr. Woodhouse is drawn with hardly less ability, though with less subtlety, than his daughter. The solicitudes of Mr. Woodhouse are undoubtedly caricatured—Miss Austen loves truth, but not truth at a vast expense of pungency—yet that is not tantamount to saying that Mr. Woodhouse himself is a caricature. There is much in him besides the self-coddler. He is grateful and affectionate and hospitable and courteous, and his anxieties are so widened by his altruism as to include the whole body of

his deplorably reckless acquaintance. Mr. Woodhouse is the mildest of men, yet being a member of the Austen world, he is precise in his mildness. If in his softness and tremors he is jelly, he is jelly in a mold. The association of ceremony with flutter was an original thought, whether the originality was nature's or Jane Austen's. Nothing in Jane's work is more endearing than the deference that is paid on all hands to a type that is normally unlucky both in its companions and its painters. Mr. Woodhouse is an egotist and fool, an exacting and trying fool, yet he is the object of unrelaxing tenderness and esteem from people who, like the Knightleys, are possessed of every excuse for impatience which health of unfeeling robustness and the curtest of tempers can bestow.

The Westons will hardly detain us. Mr. Weston, while personally a little tedious, is highly interesting as a bit of craftsmanship. He is the best of men, with all the favorable indications and all the dubious implications of that amiably insidious phrase. To be specific, he is just, kind, cheerful, friendly, talkative, a little lavish in his talk, a little indiscriminate in his cheer and comity. A comic dramatist would have left the virtues unclouded, or would have given the foibles a free hand. But Miss Austen makes a mere abatement, a qualification, both a source of difference and guarantee of reality. The picture is instinct with that rare equity which in Miss Austen

was the incongrous associate of so reckless and dashing a onesidedness. Her temper in the portrayal is as perfect as her art; it is almost as hard to despise men a little with Miss Austen as to despise them tenderly with Anatole France.

Mrs. Weston, in whom all the virtues are neatly packed and plainly labelled, has only one drawback; she has always the air of a person who comes to us superlatively recommended. We feel that she is earning our indorsement; at the end of her stay we shall be powerless to refuse her a "character." We respect her for bearing a child; that is an act of refreshing solidity in a world in which the people are mostly idle observers of each other's idleness.

Mr. Knightley, Emma's dictatorial lover, is the kind of material which anybody who can draw character at all can draw admirably. Incisiveness requires less art, or will make the same allowance of art go farther, than almost any other trait. Being the least expensive of material, it is also the most lucrative; the returns on the investment are very large in the Hotspur of Shakespeare, the Anthony Absolute of Sheridan, the Jaggers of Dickens, and the Lady Rockminster of Thackeray. Mr. Knightley is a middle-aged English landowner of redoubtable probity, great executive force, adamantine opinions, and a candor by which others profit and suffer. His speech has the velocity, regularity, and energy of a force-pump, yet manages to keep its human property

for all that. He is almost cruel in his rebuke of cruelty; one feels that he is the sort of master who would damn a servant for a lapse into profanity. I cannot but feel that this world must be far better and far better-natured than it now is before a mere flick of satire at another person's obvious and obtrusive folly can deserve the avalanche of reprobation which Emma receives for her treatment of Miss Bates. Nothing is more curious, nothing is more revelatory of Miss Austen's self-inclosed and consequential world, than the subjects which occupy the mind of this thoughtful, powerful, and unimaginative man of affairs. They include snubs to old spinsters by thoughtless young women, but they mainly deal with love. His interest in the marriage of a young farmer with a village girl engrosses him to the point of quarrelling with the woman he loves in its behalf. It is the oddest of worlds in which a novelist, assuming the part of Omphale, can find no apter instrument for Hercules than the distaff.

Mr. John Knightley is the brother of the elder Knightley and the husband of Emma's sister. I spoke just now of Miss Austen's delicate fairness to the demonstrative and genial Mr. Weston. Mr. John Knightley is a fairly good illustration of the opposite habit—the habit of making a single trait the sum and substance of the portrayal to the exclusion or unfair subordination of more vital elements in the character. Mr. John Knightley is in

most ways a very good man, but Miss Austen has no time to waste on such kickshaws as virtues. Mr. John Knightley is the possessor of an invaluable little temper of which a thrifty novelist must make the most. The point in visiting a geyser is always to arrive at or near the moment of eruption. That is exactly the point in the portrayal of Mr. John Knightley. His ill-temper is crisp enough, though in view of the smallness of its occasions and the entire innocence in many cases of the human receptacle into which its acerbities are poured, it might pass for mere peevishness, but for its assumption of logical form and its origin in a masculine chest. It is not merely in literature that the recourse to the big bow-wow strain is of service to the arrogant male.

Mr. Frank Churchill is Mr. Weston's handsome and aristocratic son. He enters the story at a very advanced point—to be precise at the one hundred and fifty-first page in an edition of three hundred and ninety-five pages; but in the interest which preludes and the sensation which accompanies this belated entrance he is comparable only to Chad in Mr. James's *Ambassadors*. Like Chad again, he is a little disappointing and not perfectly elucidated. To adopt the language of Elizabethan stage directions, after the opening flourish there are scattered alarms and excursions, which are clearly mere episodes and offshoots of some larger conflict off-stage, the pur-

port and progress of which are inscrutable from our post of observation.

Mr. Churchill is a spasmodic young person, prolific in arrivals and departures, and with feelings almost as agile as his person. There are, roughly speaking, three stages in the portrayal: the splendor of his advent, the disillusion, and the partial rehabilitation. Miss Austen has hardly time enough for thoroughness in the report of all three processes, and the second in particular is hurried and mulcted. Frank Churchill is variable; he is light; he can be momentarily unfeeling. So much we know, and we are by no means completely reassured by the condescensions and sumptuosities of his almost too bountiful repentance. We are not clear as to the extent to which we should commiserate or congratulate Jane Fairfax. In one point it seems to me that Miss Austen has committed an artistic error. After setting Frank Churchill on his feet, she is seized with a qualm of candor or a jet of spite, and gives us a last glimpse of the young man (in the final conversation with Emma at Mrs. Weston's) for no apparent purpose but that of convincing us that he is a mawkish fribble. This comes too late. I have enough of the New England housewife in me to be horrified at the spectacle of muddy foot-tracks on a floor that has been newly mopped.

I confess that I quite agree with Emma in her dislike of Jane Fairfax. I grant that her character is

exemplary, but example may be quite as irksome as precept. The irreproachableness of Jane Fairfax is a reproach to all the onlookers. There are two main points about Jane, her reserve and her pathos. The one should command respect, and the other should engage sympathy. Neither fulfils its office. There is no disguise like the appearance of openness, and nothing invites curiosity like the appearance of reserve. Jane Fairfax's bearing has the indiscretion and the impropriety of a whisper in company. As for her sufferings, there are people who have a talent for endurance which is little short of an entreaty to destiny to unload its carload of misfortunes at their door. These comments are of course rather trivial, but a reader's disposition to trifle is a matter of weight for the novelist and critic. I doubt if Jane Austen liked Jane Fairfax; at the close of the book Emma and Emma's creator seem to be doing penance together.

Miss Bates, like Mr. Woodhouse, is a humor in the old-fashioned sense. But, like Mr. Woodhouse, she is much more than a caricature, though the picture is extreme, if not burlesque, in one of its phases. The elephant's nose is greatly elongated, but the general size of the animal is a justification of the magnitude of his proboscis. Miss Bates has character enough to bear up her peculiarity. There is something snug and buxom in this spinster, the like of which is not easily to be found in the novels

of Miss Austen. We feel that she would get on with Mrs. Nubbles and Mrs. Lupin and Polly Richards and other worthies of a circle with which most of Jane's characters would be at a loss to fraternize. Her hand, if touched, would be warm—pudgy, if you insist, but warm; and there is hardly another specimen of the handiwork of her creator of whom the same thing could be securely said. She has an artless faith in the good-will of her fellow-creatures which illumines and adorns the world. Everybody is glad to survey that embellishment of himself which faces him in the trustful geniality of that simple mind, and the reader on whom she has never looked is indirectly flattered by the admiration she bestows on his inferiors.

The peculiarity which makes her the dread and wonder of her neighbors is her speech. Miss Bates is the rambling monologist, but she differs from her tribe in several interesting particulars. The Austen trade-mark is visible in the precision of her trim—her almost formal—volubility. The speech of her class tends to coagulate, to become a paste—a trait clearly observable in the much less cohesive, but much more glutinous, monologues of Mrs. Nickleby. Miss Bates always keeps her thread even when she lets it dangle, and the difference between her and the scatter-brained monologist is the difference between excursion and wandering. In the nineteenth chapter Miss Austen has some important circumstances to

impart to the reader. She does not hesitate to intrust the conveyance of these facts to the progressive if dilatory conversation of Miss Bates. In the ballroom scene the speeches are sharply punctuated, cut into blocks with an evident concern for style underlying all the superficial inadvertence. In this respect they resemble the more obviously fabricated monologues of Blanche Evers—later Blanche Wright—in Mr. James's barely remembered *Confidence*.

Mrs. Elton's character has been warmly praised. In those interesting *Opinions of Emma* cited in the *Life and Letters of Jane Austen*, four persons are particular in their admiration of Mrs. Elton. A Miss Sharp, who has sense enough to dislike Jane Fairfax, thinks Mrs. Elton beyond praise, and there is a Henry Sanford who thinks "Mrs. Elton the best-drawn character in the book." Here, again, I think of Scott's apt judgment, applied with such doubtful aptness to Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates—that the unpleasantness of a reality may overcharge the portrait. Mrs. Elton is clear, but disagreeable, and we, not having been inured to the regimen of Dotheboys Hall, grow tired of that particular mixture of brimstone and treacle, in other words of malice and smirking, which is served up to us without stint in her lavish conversation. The case would be less irksome if she had any real business in the story. But, as I have already observed, her office is merely

that of a screen or stop-gap, and her impertinence is emphasized by her inutility.

Again, Mrs. Elton is more foolish than comic, or, at all events, she does not amuse in the degree in which she repels. She has not quite the amount or kind of folly which contents a reader by the establishment of his own superiority. To insure that result, Mrs. Elton should be humbled. Nothing of the sort occurs; Mrs. Elton is secretly abominated, but, openly, she is tolerated and deferred to by everybody on the premises. Mr. Knightley is taciturn; Emma is acquiescent; Jane Fairfax is submissive; Miss Bates is idolatrous. The form of portrayal does not show Miss Austen at her very best. In Mrs. Elton's conversation, self-betrayal is abnormally, even incredibly, continuous; indeed, it goes on long after there is nothing left to betray. It is only fair to repeat after this train of objections that the character is drawn with much skill. Mrs. Elton is real to us, at least while she is in our company. In the memory I find that she undergoes a sort of disembodiment or dissolution to which Mr. Woodhouse, Emma, Mr. Knightley, and Miss Bates are by no means subject.

I find Mr. Elton a more satisfying figure—I would not say a cleverer piece of drawing—than his wife. In Mrs. Elton, the coloring is garish; in the husband the artist's own design has obliged her to stay her hand. Mr. Elton is Emma's choice for Harriet,

and Emma is Harriet's sincere, if very condescending, friend. A bound must be set to his meanness. His profession clearly sets no bound to it in the eyes of the creator of the Reverend Mr. Collins. Mr. Elton's calling, like Mr. Collins's, appears to be removable like his surplice and with his surplice. He is not merely not religious; he is not even clerical. He is a handsome young fellow in whom the sentimental and the mercenary blend as amicably as politeness and rapacity in the behavior of a shopkeeper. He is full of arch and winning ways, trappings and furbelows of manner, the forms of an effusiveness that is partly nature, partly convention, and partly strategy. In several of the early chapters through which Mr. Elton waltzes so briskly, his character no less than his attitude toward Harriet is left in a state of cunning ambiguity. "There are cats" said Violet Effingham to Phineas Finn, "who play with their mice and do not eat them, cats who eat their mice and do not play with them, and cats who play with their mice and eat them." Miss Austen may be trusted to eat her mouse in the Elton case, but she is feline in her willingness to postpone her meal to her sport. Mr. Elton, disappointed in Emma, retaliates by marrying fashion and folly in the person of Augusta Hawkins, and spends the rest of his time more quietly in the wake of his wife's train and the lee of her vocabulary. The insult to Harriet in the ball-room scene has the effect of a sudden de-

scent of Miss Austen's fist at a moment when we expected nothing more than the play of the finger-tips.

In Harriet Smith, Miss Austen faces a difficulty. She draws character as it were in straight lines, and if there is anything willowy or sinuous in the contours of her subject, the need of adjustment is obvious. The need is especially insistent in a young girl like Harriet Smith. The problem is by no means hopeless. Trollope, with a similar though slighter propensity to the rectilinear, succeeded in drawing young girls of an ideal charm and an adequate suppleness. Miss Austen asks less of Harriet, but her success in getting what she asks is considerable. Miss Smith is a light-haired and blue-eyed young thing whom an accident of birth has placed in the neutral region between two social classes, without assured footing or firm poise in either. An American girl in Harriet's place would have more spring and lissomeness. Her mind might be stored to as little purpose as that of Harriet, but at worst it would be more littered; it would not have that effect of bare walls and whitewash which belongs to those unfurnished lodgings otherwise known as the mind of Harriet Smith. One might almost complete the figure by imagining a sign "To Let" suspended in the curtainless window of Harriet's mind or heart.

A character like Harriet's needs the embellishment of simplicity, and in the formal Austen world simplicity is hard to come by. Harriet uses the

buskined diction of her associates; she affects judgment and discretion in conformity to the manners of a time when the semblance of judgment and discretion was mandatory even upon flighty little girls. But in spite of this dowager's harness which fashion has obliged her to put on, she remains a young girl, and Miss Austen, who has drawn her in a magnanimous mood, is scrupulously and studiously just to her good qualities. She bears her disappointments with unresentful patience, and omniscience in the person of Mr. Knightley is compelled in the course of time to retract a large part of its overbearing strictures. Harriet Smith is not vulgar; she is not flimsy; she is not missish. She is girlish, schoolgirlish—that is the worst that can be said. Miss Austen's power to combine attack and defense in the same portrayal is worthy of all praise. Nothing can be better than the manner in which Harriet's fluttered deference and bashful vanity are conveyed. She has less firmness perhaps than any other of Miss Austen's characters, who, take them as a class, are a tenacious and resolute set. But if the woman lacks individuality, the same cannot be said of the portrait. An artist of Miss Austen's power can impart individuality to the drawing by the very touches which deny it to the sitter.

The value of the characterization in *Emma* is great, and the novel is more individual, more in a class by itself, than any of the other books but

Pride and Prejudice. In *Pride and Prejudice*, however, the individuality is that of the author; in *Emma* it is that of the village. The communal effect, while not explicitly sought, is strongly imparted. This explains, almost justifies, the negation of plot; we feel that plots, like circuses, would skip Highbury. We feel that the stories of such a region would copy the deliberation of its brooks, and that the intervals between events might be patterned on the spaces between houses. We are in a world with broad margins, a world in which everybody's dole of space and time is larger than in the compact and bustling metropolis. There is a reserved and leisurely but persevering social life, loose but secure ties, malice enough to temper the dulness, and goodwill enough to temper the malice, a placidity which is patient of the usual, happily blent with a curiosity to which the mildest forms of the unusual are exciting. Is a society of this kind vacuous? Its neighborship to the earth and the processes by which earth is tilled and man is fed prevent it from becoming that. Bovine in a sense the life of "Emma" is, but "bovine" is a word of various suggestiveness, and included creatures in the early Greek mythology who were thought worthy of Apollo's mastership and of the forays of the youthful Hermes. We are not surprised that a book to which such an epithet should be even loosely applicable should be the healthiest and sunniest of Miss Austen's works.

CHAPTER VI

PERSUASION

Persuasion is a story without a plot. In 1811, the date of its commencement, a plot or the semblance of a plot, was imperative, and a large part of the author's ingenuity is devoted to the concealment of the omission from the eye of the analytic reader. The problem is very similar to that of Colonel and Mrs. Crawley, who undertook to live fashionably on exactly nothing a year. The original economy of mental effort in the fable has forced Miss Austen into such an expenditure of ingenuity on makeshifts and evasions that it might have been cheaper in the long run to pay her way.

Some years before the story opens Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth had confessed a mutual passion, but Anne, in deference to the will of a father and submission to the counsels of a friend, had broken off the engagement. Eight years later, at the opening of the narrative, the lovers are brought together once more. The renewal of the engagement is the obvious consequence. Miss Austen is bound to prevent, or rather postpone, the arrival of a consummation so portentous to a novelist, but her embarrassments are very great. The pecuniary

obstacle to the union has disappeared, and no resource is left but the evocation of drama out of changes of heart and the demand for psychic readjustments. But here again the situation is as complacent to the lovers as it is obdurate to Miss Austen. The man and woman still care passionately for each other, though the man for a short period wilfully feigns the contrary to himself. What is left for Miss Austen to do? She temporizes, and of these temporizings the book is made.

A rival is provided for Anne and another for Captain Wentworth, but as neither of these rivals makes the smallest impression on the incorrigible loyalty of the primary actors, the gain in drama is hardly worth the cost in trouble. Captain Wentworth is drawn into some random attentions to Louisa Musgrove. Louisa suffers a fall for which his nicety of conscience makes him answerable. He is ready to offer the restorative of marriage; but Miss Austen, who is equally anxious to insure and to postpone his reunion with Anne, becomes vastly disquieted, and snatches Louisa from Captain Wentworth by the crude expedient of a precipitate and causeless attachment between Louisa and another man. We have retraced our steps and stand once more at the point of departure.

Miss Austen's perplexity is great, but a doctor's resource for a troublesome case and a novelist's expedient for an invalid story are one and the same.

They must go to Bath. At Bath people move about and bustle in the effort to hide their want of occupation. A story in the same predicament may gratefully accept a like relief. Nearly everybody goes to Bath. Anne meets a suitor, a cousin also named Elliot, a man of agreeable manners and of that designing character which agreeable manners so often overlie in the novels of Miss Austen. The jealousy of Captain Wentworth is excited. An old acquaintance of Anne, whose perfunctory rôle in the story is adumbrated in the name of Smith, unmasks the baseness of Mr. Elliot's character. As Anne's reluctance to accept any suitor but Captain Wentworth is invincible, the utility of this disclosure remains obscure. Even the exertions of a novelist can no longer keep the lovers apart, but the contrivance by which understanding is brought about is so clumsy and artificial that perhaps it ought not to surprise us to hear that it has been warmly admired. Anne, in a rather intimate conversation with a rather distant acquaintance, expresses her deepest convictions on the subject of the duration of attachments in woman. Captain Wentworth, in the same room, at a distance so artfully planned that he can hear perfectly without being suspected of overhearing, becomes aware of Anne's unchanging fidelity. He writes a letter on the spot containing such apostrophes as "You good, you excellent creature," and such asseverations as "You pierce my soul." Anne,

fortunately in a mood which makes criticism of style impossible, responds in the affirmative, and happiness, abrupt from the very length of its delay, descends upon the reunited lovers.

One episode of dramatic interest is handled with an unconcern which makes the mystery of its insertion doubly dark. A species of adventuress, Mrs. Clay, has obtained a footing in the household of Anne's father, Sir Walter Elliot, and seeks to entrap the widowed baronet into a marriage. The jealous heir to the title and estate baffles this design by diverting her affections to himself. The woman, in spite of the projecting tooth and freckles, is artistically hardly more than a profile, her story is a mere edge, and it is hard to see why Miss Austen should have cared to make anything of a point of which she cared to make so little.

Miss Austen's work in *Persuasion* may be described as teasing the reader, finding excuse after excuse for withholding from him a satisfaction which she is almost as eager to grant as he to obtain. It is quite true that character and psychology find a way through the broad intervals in this loosely matted fabric, but it is also true that they make a passage even more successfully through the compact and serried woof of a novel like *Pride and Prejudice.*

The book is meant to show that in the disposition of their hearts young people are often wiser than their confident and urgent seniors. The proposition

is sound enough, is even stale to our contumacious generation, but in Miss Austen's time it no doubt savored of revolution, and the novelist's timidity in the advocacy of courage makes her load her doctrine with disabling qualifications. She recommends independence to young people in very much the fashion in which Mr. Woodhouse recommended the questionable dishes on his table to the consumption of Mrs. Goddard and Miss Bates. "Miss Bates, let Emma help you to a little bit of tart—a very little bit. . . . I do not advise the custard. Mrs. Goddard, what say you to half a glass of wine? A small half-glass, put into a tumbler of water? I do not think it could disagree with you."

We noted in *Pride and Prejudice* a list of sixteen characters who might almost be termed principals with a secondary list of eight whom a little persuasion or good-nature might allure into the same category. *Mansfield Park*, a family tale, retrenches this abundance, and even *Emma*, which is almost the chronicle of a village, is not populous after the style of *Pride and Prejudice*. But in *Persuasion*, the absence of plot which restricts the capacity of the main characters to furnish diversion, obliges Miss Austen, like a spectacular dramatist, to pack the stage as an offset to the scantness of the entertainment. There are eighteen characters of appreciable value: Sir Walter Elliot, Elizabeth Elliot, Anne Elliot, William Elliot, Charles Musgrove, Mary Musgrove, Henri-

etta Musgrove, Louisa Musgrove, Charles Hayter, Captain Wentworth, Captain Benwick, Captain Harville, Admiral Croft, Mrs. Croft, Mrs. Clay, Mrs. Smith, Lady Russell, Mr. Shepherd. Few of these people do much; even Anne and Captain Wentworth are by no means burdened with occupation; but not one of them, however few and brief his appearances, is a mere blank or cavity when he does appear. While this is true and interesting, it must not blind us to the fact that the sum total of effective characterization in this novel is decidedly smaller than in any other work of its creator. There is a shyness in the book which seems to place a barrier between us and the persons of the drama. The novel declines to face us; it lacks the immediacy of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Anne Elliot is the charm, as she is the nucleus and centre, of *Persuasion*. She is just the sort of placid and gentle person whose virtues are a security to every one except the novelist. In Scott's hands she would have been a Lucy Bertram, as indistinct as "water is in water," or at best a Lucy Ashton owing chiefly to lunacy her ability to excite us. Miss Austen remarks of Anne with instructive frankness: "She is almost too good for me." Anne is twenty-seven, and is supposed to have lost her bloom, but on this delicate point there is a vacillation that shakes our faith in Miss Austen's vigilance. The loss of beauty has gone so far that Frederick Wentworth,

after a separation of eight years, finds her "altered beyond knowledge," or at best "wretchedly altered." At Lyme, not long after this, her appearance has mended to the point of making a deep and lasting impression on the mind of a virtual stranger—a cousin who sees her for the first time without knowing of the cousinship. Miss Austin feels that these are dubious procedures, and falters out something about the west wind and its reparative power upon faded beauty. It is clear that we have all underrated the west wind.

I am fond of Anne, but I suspect that she is rather sympathetic than interesting. She is really in love, and the love in her is perhaps more positive than Anne herself. There is also a core of vigor in the portrayal, an infiltration from the robustness of Miss Austen's temperament, which blends with sensibility and melancholy and fragility without either losing itself or nullifying them. For my own pleasure, I could wish that Anne was less subject to agitation. I feel the same mixture of pity and irritation before the quivers and tremors that I should feel for a woman whose veils and draperies were blown hither and thither in the turbulence of a high wind. The embarrassment may be real, but the costume seems to invite it. Anne has the wisdom with which one must always reckon in Miss Austen's heroines without the antiseptic humor which attends it in the best of them.

Anne's father, Sir Walter Elliot, is an insolvent baronet, obsessed with his rank, and an elderly widower, infatuated with his own beauty. Among Miss Austen's extreme comic types he is the only one who approximates the bore. I think one desires that vanity should be nimble; Sir Walter is heavy and pompous. In one point he is a sore trial to one's faith. That a man past fifty should pique himself on his beauty is credible enough. That his demand for beauty in women should be peremptory is excusable. But that he should insist that another man—even a man past fifty—is recreant to his social obligations unless he flaunts a handsome face, is outside of nature, as nature is conceived by a Western American like myself. His company even in print is repugnant, and Miss Austen, solicitous of good measure, has added a sheer badness of heart which was hardly required for the exploitation of his follies.

In Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, the folly is hardly comic, and it is combined with an asperity which makes the narrative thorny without furthering the plot. The third daughter, Mary, married to Charles Musgrove, is an effective specimen of the imaginary invalid type. The point in which Mary contrasts happily with her tribe is that while she complains she does not whimper. She is crisp where the ordinary self-cherisher is sodden, and there is a briskness in her protestations of infirmity which re-

lieves the alarm of the most credulous listener. Her changes of front are rather acrobatic, but they stop short of that almost professional gusto which stamps the agilities of Isabella Thorpe. If half of Mary lies outside of nature, the other half is sufficingly natural, and the lie and the truth divide the pungency pretty evenly between them.

Charles Musgrove as a portrait is far finer, though much less piquant, than his wife. The fineness lies in the art that has kept an ordinary character from melting into the mass with which its affiliations are so plentiful. Charles is a country gentleman with a fondness for hunting. In mind he is at once rather vacuous and pretty sensible, and in his disposition a healthy selfishness finds itself on the best of terms with an ample good-nature. Nothing in him is overcharged, not even the commonplace. Daudet remarked of a certain X: "He excels in mediocrity." Not even this form of extravagance can be charged against Miss Austen's delineation of Charles Musgrove.

The parents of Charles are little more than a background for their children, and Charles's two sisters, Henrietta and Louisa, offer little to win the attention or anchor the memory. Henrietta, indeed, is less than a sketch, but one of the shrewdest points among the secondary realisms of the book is associated with her name. Her momentary and hesitating estrangement from Charles Hayter, followed, not instantly but quickly, by an eager return to the

old suitor, is wholly in the key of life. With Louisa a little more is attempted. If Miss Austen does not actually begin to draw Louisa, at least we can see her biting the end of her pencil. Louisa affects backbone, and Nemesis retorts with a fall in which the spine nearly comes to grief. Captain Wentworth has a preference for women of strong character, and the strength of Louisa's character had been growing by leaps and bounds ever since she discovered this preference in the captain. One cannot help speculating on the possible consequences of his expression of a predilection for fragile and tremulous women. In the section of the country in which I live one often sees over a vacant lot the announcement: "Owner will build to suit tenant." One cannot but feel that Louisa Musgrove's character building was regulated on the same principle.

There are four sailors in *Persuasion*, of whom the most prominent and perhaps the most interesting is Anne's lover, Captain Wentworth. We do not see much of the captain. He is not reserved perhaps, but he is very far from talkative. He has special reasons for effacing himself in Anne's presence, and as Anne is our conductress through the story, and we see and hear only through Anne's eyes and ears, our impressions are both incomplete and second-hand. We hear much of his handsome person and determined character, and still more of his agreeable and distinguished manners. Miss

Austen in this novel appears to have humored in her sisters or herself that markedly feminine point of view which regards man as a furtherance to soirées. Captain Wentworth is manly enough, but what impresses everybody in the story, including the authoress, is his being so immaculately eligible. From Congreve's Ben in *Love for Love* to Smollett's Commodore Trunnion and Dickens's Captain Cuttle, the conversation of sailors has been a sort of brine; indeed the sea lingo has often risen, or sunk, into a mannerism. It is rather curious that the only novelist, I suppose, in English literature who had two brothers in the admiralty should paint sailors so emphatically in their unprofessional capacity, their capacity as gentlemen. The four sailors in *Persuasion* mention the sea; they even discuss ships: but the profession to which they are wedded appears in their conversation in much the same incidental and intermittent way in which their human consorts would appear. Their speech doesn't "foam tar," if I may appropriate and pervert a phrase of Spenser's.

Captain Harville, who enters the story under the disadvantage of being called "a perfect gentleman," never recovers from this initial bruise. I do not know whether his gentility is supposed to be reenforced by his uttering one speech with a "deep sigh," and another with a "quivering lip." He certainly qualifies himself to take part in the stilted dialogue which reveals the state of Anne's heart

to the palpitating Captain Wentworth in what is almost a modernized version of a mediæval débat.

Captain Benwick is another plaintive sailor. The recent loss of his betrothed has doubled his sensibility to the *Bride of Abydos* and to the charms of other women. I will not say that Captain Benwick is the male counterpart to the woman in Maupassant's story who, visiting her lover's grave in the earliest stages of bereavement, accepted the consolations of another lover on the spot. It is certain, however, that in less than a year after the death of Fanny Captain Benwick engaged himself to Louisa, having previously encouraged his friends to believe that he was about to engage himself to Anne. The character is uninteresting, though the psychology is probable. The mood of sentimental contemplation which fidelity induces is favorable to infidelity.

The only sailor in whom any salt is perceptible is the excellent and excellently pictured Admiral Croft. He is a natural and lovable person, full of quiet bustle and tender whimsicality, with the half-coaxing imperiousness in which an inherently modest man finds a covert for his modesty. His interest in affairs of the heart and his total inability to follow their complications endear him to the more discerning sex. He is one of the few humorous characters in Miss Austen who owe nothing to exaggeration. His wife is exactly what a wife should be—a person whose

relation to him is symbolized in her place, side by side with him in the great world and opposite—not adverse—to him in domesticity.

Mr. Elliot is the man of shrewd brain and of unexceptionable manners who dispenses with the impedimenta of a heart and conscience. The exemplar of this type is perhaps the Edmund of *King Lear*, and it finds more recent analogues in the Rastignacs of the *Comédie Humaine* and the Lord Illingworths and Dorian Grays of Oscar Wilde. Miss Austen is chary in the portraiture of an only half-congenial type, and her Mr. Elliot differs from his class chiefly in the fact that he lives rather more in the salubrities of his attractive surface and rather less in the sordidness of his base interior than the beguiling hypocrite of average fiction. This seems to have the indorsement of nature. If a man's house has a pleasant veranda and a fetid living-room, common sense and human impulse would seem to indicate that he spend the better part of his time on the veranda. Mr. Elliot's relation to Mrs. Clay is something like that of Fabrice to Clorinde in Augier's *L'Aventurière*—the relation, in a word, of the jealous kinsman to the designing intruder. This intrigue, which is not at all in Miss Austen's way, is reduced in her gingerly treatment to a faint outline, and a bold and brilliant sequel, which is still less in her way, is smuggled, so to speak, into eight lines of the concluding chapter. This sequel is the victimiza-

tion by Mrs. Clay of the very man whose diplomacy has thwarted her designs for the victimization of his cousin. Of Mrs. Clay little is visible but her freckles and her projecting tooth; the most exacting reader craves no more.

Mrs. Smith is that virtuous woman in reduced circumstances to whom so many novels have offered an asylum. Her innocence hardly extenuates her dulness. Lady Russell is one of those exemplary persons whose judgment lends a deadly effectiveness to its own blunders.

In *Persuasion* there are but four characters of real value: Anne Elliot, Mary Musgrove, Charles Musgrove, Admiral Croft. As a group these are far inferior to interest to a similar quartet taken from a novel so reduced in scale and so moderately peopled as *Northanger Abbey*—to be specific, with such a quartet as Catherine Morland, Henry Tilney, John Thorpe, Isabella Thorpe. When this showing in character is combined with the conspicuous feebleness in plot, the secondary place of *Persuasion* in Miss Austen's work is unmistakable.

CHAPTER VII

THE GROUP OF NOVELS

THE full criticisms I have given to the plots of the several novels will enable me to abridge my general comments on the Austen plots. I may say, in a word, that *Sense and Sensibility* reads like the 'prentice-work of a born expert; *Pride and Prejudice*, speaking broadly, is unreservedly excellent; *Northanger Abbey* begins with mature power, only to relapse into juvenility; *Mansfield Park*, in its cemented love-affairs, is a much reduced but appreciable success on the same lines as *Pride and Prejudice; Emma* is a half lucky, half unlucky, shift to a newer and looser method; *Persuasion* is an unqualified failure. I speak solely with reference to plot. My own order would be as follows: first, and much the first, *Pride and Prejudice;* second, *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* almost on a level; fourth, at a marked distance, *Sense and Sensibility;* fifth, again, at a distance, *Northanger Abbey;* and, lastly, *Persuasion.*

So wide a grade in so scant a field is remarkable; and probably *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* indicate the normal level of a talent which unconcern lowered in *Persuasion* and accident raised in *Pride and Prejudice.* The difference between the plots of *Mansfield*

Park and *Emma* in kind is much greater than the difference in merit. My feeling prefers *Emma;* my reason, *Mansfield Park;* and in such conflicts I think it *reasonable* to prefer one's *feeling*. *Mansfield Park* is an old-fashioned tale, somewhat cumbered with a biographical and a domestic bias, neither of which is in the least favorable to strictness of logical continuity. *Emma* is a village chronicle or civic record, a later genus, which Bulwer-Lytton was to pursue in the first part of *My Novel*, and Trollope to adumbrate in the Barsetshire series, and to which George Eliot was to give the distinction of rounded finality in *Middlemarch*. In such a case the looseness of the plan is the defense of the looseness of the particulars; a hole in a tightly woven basket is a far more serious offense than an interval of the size of a hole in a basket of which the woof is avowedly open. The independence of the Elton-Smith and Churchill-Fairfax love-affairs in *Emma* is inoffensive, because the reader has not been lantern-led by the supposition that one of them was to influence the other. But the failure of the Elliot courtship to exert any influence upon the relations between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion* is an offense, because the reader has been induced to confide in its relevancy.

Jane Austen was very fond of persons in her novels, and her fondness was comprehensive; she had acquired from those provincial balls in which she half

eagerly, half deprecatingly, participated a relish for watching a dozen or two of people in simultaneous and loosely complicated action. A taste of this kind is inimical to logic, especially if it be combined with a predilection for truth. Nature is thoroughly masculine in her fondness for logic, that is for an internal or ultimate logic; but she is brazenly feminine in the fitful and desultory way in which logic is distributed among the appearances of things. On the surface—and novels in the broad sense deal with surfaces—she refuses to be compactly or intricately logical. She is stubborn in her reluctance to cast the relations of a dozen persons for a considerable period into logical form. If a novelist wants to portray many persons, he must choose between logic and nature, in other words between artifice and incoherence. Dickens, in his populously intricate fictions, to his gain and to his loss, chose artifice. But for Jane Austen the grand scale of Dickens was impracticable. Her world was a Belgium—populous but minute. Moreover, never easy outside of nature and those simple though notable modifications of nature to which she was inclined, she had neither taste nor capacity for artifice.

The result is a falling-off in coherence. The amount of injury which this did to her work will be variously estimated, but the story as story has so declined in authority in our day that a mere crack in its frame evokes no lively displeasure. The world on this point has all but revolted to Jane Austen.

Moreover, Jane was a true craftsman in her way. She liked her work—liked solicitude in her work. The adaptations, the congruities, the comities, of particulars, were dear to her woman's hand. Without being scrupulous, she was nice. If she permitted large folds in her work, it amused her to smooth out the little wrinkles. A very clear illustration of what is meant may be found in the use of the Palmers in *Sense and Sensibility*. The Palmers are really quite otiose in the story; Marianne's sickness did not require the appropriation of their country-house. But the visit, though badly conceived, is deftly prearranged by the introduction of the Palmers in the first half of the tale, and an urgent, farsighted invitation to the two sisters to spend their Christmas at Cleveland. The same thing is observable in *Emma*. In that placid, yet vigorous, novel an exquisite art overlies a clumsy art; everything falls to pieces, but the pieces cling together. In a letter criticising a manuscript novel of her niece, Anna Lefroy, Miss Austen says: "Had you not better give some hint of St. Julian's early history in the beginning of the story?" In *Persuasion*, written partly in failing health, she is sometimes unobservant of her own precept. Mrs. Smith is introduced in Chapter XVII without the salve of an anticipatory reference in the early chapters. Let not the young reader be too much startled at these inconsistencies. The willingness to work hard to

avoid a bad error in its association with the unwillingness to work harder to avoid a worse is one of the most normal if least logical things in that normally illogical contrivance known as human nature.

I think we shall find in Miss Austen's style another illustration of the same form of inconsistency. I should call her style, in the first instance, a diagonal between her taste and her conscience, and, in the second instance, a compromise between her zeal and her ease. To take up the first point: the following sentences from her letters will show how she wrote when she obeyed her instinct.

> Your abuse of our gowns amuses but does not discourage me; I shall take mine to be made up next week, and the more I look at it the better it pleases me. My cloak came on Tuesday, and, though I expected a good deal, the beauty of the lace astonished me. It is too handsome to be worn—almost too handsome to be looked at. The glass is all safely arrived also, and gives great satisfaction. The wine-glasses are much smaller than I expected, but I suppose it is the proper size. We find no fault with your manner of performing any of our commissions, but if you like to think yourself remiss in any of them, pray do.

I will now quote a passage from Dr. Johnson, which I imagine to have conformed pretty closely to her notion of the decorous and desirable in English style.

> But biography has often been allotted to writers, who seem very little acquainted with the nature of their task, or very negligent about the performance. They rarely afford any other account than might be collected from publick papers, but

imagine themselves writing a life, when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments; and have so little regard to the manners or behaviour of their heroes, that more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral.

There are indeed, some natural reasons why these narratives are often written by such as were not likely to give much instruction or delight, and why most accounts of particular persons are barren and useless. If a life be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence; for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition. We know how few can pourtray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable peculiarities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance to the original.

It must be remembered that Jane Austen was ultimately a docile person. She had her whims and rebellions and naughtinesses, for which the readers of her books and letters are profoundly thankful, but she knew the boundaries of her playground. She wished to express herself, but she wished to observe the proprieties. Imagine a cosy New-England body renting an Italian palace and trying to infuse into its large and desolate rooms a little of the domesticity and cheerfulness proper to her own ideas of housekeeping, and the extent of Jane's problem will become clear. Or, moving the simile to English soil, her problem was not wholly unlike that of the

Tilneys in carving or scooping a home out of the austerities of Northanger Abbey.

Of course, one can imagine a solution that would have been ideally perfect. The formality might have conferred the elegance which we so often miss in the brisker styles, and the impulse might have insured the sprightliness the absence of which has so often made elegance formidable. But actuality is rarely so clever as speculation, and *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, though well written throughout, does not quite sustain the union of opposite merits which marks its exquisite beginning.

> It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.
>
> However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

If only this manner could have tinged the whole book. The issue would have been much the same as if a lively person, in a time of family mourning, wanting to wear pink and bidden to wear sables, should have compromised on lilac. In Miss Austen's case, however, the austerities often carry the day, as in the following account of a man whose pompous diction is to serve as a butt for the novelist's most intolerant satire.

> Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the

greater part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father; and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which his father has brought him up had given him originally great humility of manner; but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequential feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his right as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance, and humility.

This is fighting the ponderous with its own weapons. In concreteness of any sort, and especially in action, the style gains in trimness and vigor. When it goes out for a walk it loops up its skirts. I need hardly say that in the plain but priceless merits that come from knowing precisely what one wants to say its proficiency is invariable. Jane Austen's hold on facts is muscular.

Pride and Prejudice was written, on the whole, with the scrupulosity of a débutante dressing for her first ball. Even in this book passages can be found in which vigilance is relaxed and facility replaces neatness.

Mr. Darcy was expected there in the course of a few weeks and though there were not many of her acquaintance whom she did not prefer, his coming would furnish one comparatively new to look at in their Rosings parties, and she might be amused

in seeing how hopeless Miss Bingley's designs on him were, by his behaviour to his cousin, for whom he was evidently destined by Lady Catherine, who talked of his coming with the greatest satisfaction, spoke of him in terms of the highest admiration, and seemed almost angry to find that he had already been frequently seen by Miss Lucas and herself.

A sentence of this type accommodates particulars with the elasticity of a third-rate lodging-house. The following from *Mansfield Park* reads like an uncorrected college theme:

The subject of reading aloud was further discussed. The two young men were the only talkers, but they, standing by the fire, talked over the too common neglect of the qualification, the total inattention to it, in the ordinary school-system for boys, the consequently natural, yet in some instances almost unnatural, degree of ignorance and uncouthness of men, when suddenly called to the necessity of reading aloud, which had fallen within their notice, giving instances of blunders, and failures with their secondary causes, the want of management of the voice, of proper modulation and emphasis, of foresight and judgment, all proceeding from the first cause: want of early attention and habit; and Fanny was listening again with great entertainment.

Did Miss Austen read aloud her own paragraphs? In *Mansfield Park* a decline in grace of style is evident, and in *Emma* the falling-off is marked. I quote the opening of Chapter IV, italicizing the phrases which a lover of harmony and symmetry would have altered.

Harriet Smith's intimacy at Hartfield was soon a settled thing. Quick and decided in her ways, Emma lost no time in inviting, encouraging and telling her to come very often; and as their ac-

quaintance increased, *so did their satisfaction in each other*. As a walking companion, Emma had very early foreseen how useful she might find her. In that respect Mrs. Weston's loss had been important. Her father never went beyond the shrubbery, where two divisions of the ground sufficed him *for his long walk, or his short, as the year varied;* and since Mrs. Weston's marriage her exercise had been too much confined. She had ventured once alone to Randalls *but it was not pleasant;* and a Harriet Smith, therefore, one whom she could summon at any time to a walk, would be a valuable addition to her privileges. But in every respect, *as she saw more of her, she approved her*, and was confirmed in all her *kind designs*.

Possibly none of the errors I have noted can be called a blemish, but all of them are annoyances, all proofs that we are not dealing with the exigent stylist. Miss Austen is not ringing each sentence on the counter of her ear, as a usurer tests coins to make sure of their claim to acceptance. The style preserves the aspect of solicitude, but disintegration, neither very rapid nor very slow, is clearly visible. The truth is that style, like other delicate things, is fragile, and one of its great enemies is the success of its possessor. The novice's attention to language in the days of his apprenticeship is like the lover's attention to dress while courtship is in progress. Its aim is propitiation, and when the lady or the public is won, and the consent is ratified by marriage or fame, only the man who loves dress or style for its own sake will persevere in wearisome niceties. Miss Austen was always an able or facile writer to whom many neat things offered themselves

without compulsion or entreaty; *Emma* itself has no lack of neat things: but the evil of having felicities visit you unbidden is the unwillingness you feel to go in search of them when they are refractory or disobliging. Miss Austen liked style very well, but I think she liked ease and liked speed, and the English in her last three novels is the mixed result of these diverging tendencies.

Quite apart from her abounding humor, Miss Austen had a talent for crispness in language to which she was indisposed to give full play. I cannot help wishing she had written oftener in the style of the following characterization of Mrs. Bennet: "She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news." I sometimes fancy that Miss Austen's style would have profited by the adjournment of her date of birth by fifty or seventy-five years. A clever woman can always get a great deal of her own way in the teeth of the social restrictions and literary habits to which she feels bound to defer, but always less than she might have had under a system that favored liberty. Diana of the Crossways would have been a completer woman in 1900 than in 1800, and Jane Austen's style might have been bettered not so much by the instruction as

by the countenance of the fashions exemplified in Macaulay and Thackeray.

Jane Austen's diction is of a lustrous purity, and her grammar is normally sound. It is a natural grammar, flowing like a spring out of the soil of her native Kent, not let in by pedagogic irrigation. In that test point of English, the discrimination of "shall" and "will," her usage has a boldness and a precision that in itself must have recommended her work to the esteem of Macaulay. She is perfectly secure in the remotest of its intricacies, and I could half wish that the young barbarians all at play in our American colleges could be enjoined to read her *Letters* through with pointed reference to her virtuosity in this particular. On the other hand, a grammar which has the grace and fortune to be untaught has the drawback of being uncritical, and certain loosenesses, which no doubt prevailed in her circle, fairly rioted in her letters and novels. The slovenly use of the plural pronouns, "they," "their," and "them," in dependence on the singular antecedents, "everybody," "every one," "each," and the like, is unceasing, and appears even where the avoidance of confusion between the sexes cannot possibly be advanced as an excuse. Miss Austen not only writes: "Everybody was pleased to think how much they had always disliked Mr. Darcy," but, in relation to two women: "Each felt for the other, and of course for themselves." Of course this is no worse than Lyly's:

"Each Fury skips and flings into her lap their whips" or Galsworthy's: "Each of these ladies held fans in their hands," but the original sin in the usage is not expiated by the gentility of its sponsors. Miss Austen is also overfond of that scarcely incorrect but highly inelegant use of the relative "which" which makes it subtend, not a noun or pronoun, but a clause. "Mr. Hinton is expected home soon, which is a good thing for the shirts." She has a fashion of using the subjunctive "were" in place of the indicative "was" in contexts where the former is unsupported by any precedent, either in speech or literature, which I succeed in recalling. She writes: "Imputing his visit to a wish of hearing that she were better"; "Before her answer were sent"; "And that Serle and the butler should see that everything were safe in the house." In the invalid, not to say the moribund, English subjunctive, such aggressiveness is peculiarly surprising.

I have little heart for the criticism of those discarded or unfinished works which the zeal of friends * —often as much to be dreaded as the malice of enemies—extracts from the cabinets of dead authors, and bares to the vain curiosity of an idle world. I presume, however, that I should be held critically remiss, if I failed to say a word on the early but undated *Lady Susan* and the maturer but un-

* In justice to Mr. J. E. Austen Leigh, who gave *Lady Susan* to the world, it may be said that he yielded reluctantly to repeated solicitations. I honor his reluctance and regret its futility.

revised and unfinished *Watsons*. *Lady Susan* is the story, in forty-one short letters, of the machinations of a Balzackian woman, a woman not only unprincipled, but bad-hearted and cold-blooded, who has a place and technical standing in fashionable English society and in a distrustful, but accommodating, family circle. If the treatment is weak in its entire absence of gusto, it is respectable in its total relinquishment of the levity of melodrama. Lady Susan herself is no bugaboo, but a study, and while it cannot be classed as a strong study, the cool resolve which is its main ingredient distinguishes it sharply from the juvenile and the commonplace. The book is arctic perhaps in a sense, but it shows the firmness no less than the rigidity of frost. Possibly the most promising trait in the book is an artistic severity, which is strong enough to hold even the moral severity in check. The book is quite correct in its awards of praise and rebuke, but it declines to excite itself over the fact of disapproval.

The fragmentary *Watsons*, though much better than *Lady Susan*, calls for less comment, because it deals with Miss Austen's habitual material, assemblies, visits, gossip, and flirtations, in a swifter and sketchier form of the customary Austen manner. The treatment, both of character and incident, is a little lean, but the narrative shows a lightness and speed which I doubt if it always reaches in finished works where it has the weight of style to carry.

PART II

THE REALIST

CHAPTER VIII

THE REALIST

I MUST treat with some fulness Miss Austen's general method in character-drawing, because her truth to life is mainly exhibited in her portraits, and the correction of certain common misapprehensions as to the nature and extent of her truth to life is the main purpose of this book. The calm remark of her grand-nephew that she describes men and women exactly as men and women really are would perhaps be accepted without dissent or qualification by the majority of trustworthy judges; but, waiving for the moment all question as to the narrowness of her field, which, as the image and measure of the narrowness of her life, was an attestation of her realism, I believe that even within that field her accuracy is subject to two great deductions—a deduction on the score of decoration or convention and another on the score of extravagance or hyperbole. In both these points I believe her to have been the child and inheritor of the eighteenth century, as in her faithfulness to truth in other matters she was the forerunner and in part the parent of the nineteenth and the twentieth.

The eighteenth century was a curious mingling of

the courtly and the brutal. It was an age in which a clergyman like Sterne could write like a rake, and in which a rogue like Defoe could write like an evangelist; an age in which a rough rider like Smollett, a vagabond like Goldsmith, and a prodigal like Sheridan could practice and to all appearances relish a stately and decorous diction framed in ceremonious and rotund periods. In the ancient Indian dramas the aristocrats spoke Sanskrit, while the inferior characters contented themselves with a vulgar dialect known as Prakrit. Now the eighteenth-century dramatists and novelists had a homespun speech for everyday people, while they contrived a formal Sanskrit for the use of their high-born and high-bred characters. The convention is not limited to language, but language is one of its plainest and most notable manifestations and is a point of distinct value for the criticism of Miss Austen. There is not the slightest doubt that Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, Johnson, and Mrs. Radcliffe bequeathed their stilts to her, and there is every evidence that she was proud and happy in the legacy.

Let us see how her people talk in an early novel, *Sense and Sensibility*.

"Whoever may have been so detestably your enemy, let them be cheated of their malignant triumph, my dear sister, by seeing how nobly the consciousness of your own innocence and good intentions supports your spirits. It is a reasonable and laudable pride which resists such malevolence."

Is this the exuberance of youth which maturity will prune? Let us try Jane Austen by a novel finished after forty. Anne has just told Mr. Elliot that she is a very poor Italian scholar.

"Yes, yes, I see you are. I see you know nothing of the matter. You have only knowledge enough of the language to translate at sight these inverted, transposed, curtailed Italian lines into clear, comprehensible, elegant English. You need not say anything more of your ignorance. Here is complete proof."

"I will not oppose such kind politeness; but I should be sorry to be examined by a real proficient."

How does a lively girl talk to the father from whom she has inherited her own racy humor? These are the words of Elizabeth Bennet:

It is not of peculiar, but of general evils, which * I am now complaining. Our importance, our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character. Excuse me,—for I must speak plainly. If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous;—a flirt, too, in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation; without any attraction beyond youth and a tolerable person; and, from the ignorance and emptiness of her mind, wholly unable to ward off any portion of that universal contempt which her rage for admiration will excite. In this danger Kitty is also comprehended. She will follow wherever Lydia leads. Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrolled.

* Observe the curious substitution of "which" for "that."

The extreme censure that I can pass upon this specimen of conversation is that it would have been approved by the author of *Pamela* and extolled as superlative by the author of *Rasselas*. "In this danger Kitty is also comprehended." The diction is senatorial. But Miss Austen does not stop at pomp. She of all persons must traffic in romantic melancholy. The following lines are not engraved upon a tombstone; they are part of Anne Elliot's speech to a mere acquaintance: "All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one: you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone." This decides the eavesdropping Captain Wentworth; it would have decided me. Even that acme of affected elegance, the use of the third person for the second, is not spared us. Captain Wentworth is talking to Louisa Musgrove: "If Louisa Musgrove would be beautiful and happy in her November of life, she will cherish all her present powers of mind." German romanticism could hardly go further.

Do all of Miss Austen's characters talk in periods? By no means. If a character is ill-bred, or, if he is comic or fatuous, he is allowed to talk in a vivid and natural way. The reader of Jane Austen—even the educated reader—is under the constant humiliation of seeing the English which he himself talks appropriated to the fools and grotesques in her

novels. The grace of naturalness is permitted only to the under-bred. Miss Austen was too clearheaded to imagine that she was drawing life in the lofty diction of her favored characters; that diction was merely her way, as it was her century's way, of letting the reader know that the persons so expressing themselves were ladies and gentlemen. It was a most arbitrary, circuitous, and cumbersome way of imparting the fact, and reflected pointedly, if not quite fairly, on the genuineness of a breeding which had to be identified by a fabrication. A dictum which I reserve the right to amend by an important deduction later on may be stated provisionally in this form: From one large field of truth Jane Austen was debarred by her conformity to the prescriptions of her age. For her, distinctions of rank were capital, and since dress, the ordinary badge of people of rank, could not be transported into literature, she turned their speech into costume. The plays and novels of men like Galsworthy had not yet taught the world that refinement and distinction might find in simplicity not a peril but a safeguard. The athlete can afford to strip himself, and the true gentleman does not fear to lay aside pomp.

It may be said that I am going too fast, that a century which made fine language the convention of gentility in literature might make it the convention of gentility in life, that the condemnation of

Jane Austen by the living critic is the condemnation of the eye-witness by the absentee. I admit Miss Austen's authority, and to that authority I will appeal. It is impossible to believe that on normal occasions she heard any better English than she spoke, and it is equally impossible to believe that she spoke any better English—in the sense of finer or comelier English—than she wrote in her letters. I will take a passage from the very first page on which I light in opening the *Letters* at random. Whatever elegance or intricacy is superadded to this in the conversation of her high-bred characters is clearly superadded to nature.

> The Evelyns returned our visit on Saturday; we were very happy to meet, and all that; they are going to-morrow into Gloucestershire to the Dolphins for ten days. Our acquaintance, Mr. Woodward, is just married to a Miss Rowe, a young lady rich in money and music.
>
> I thank you for your Sunday's letter, it is very long and very agreeable. I fancy you know more particulars of our sale than we do; we have heard the price of nothing but the cows, bacon, hay, hops, tables, and my father's chest of drawers and study table. Mary is more minute in her account of their own gains than in ours; probably being better informed in them. I will attend to Mrs. Lloyd's commission and to her abhorrence of musk when I write again.

What is the effect of this limitation on Miss Austen's delineation of character? Naturally, the disadvantage, the incumbrance, is very great. But the elasticity of Miss Austen's rebound from the stringencies of this compression is as noteworthy

as the compression itself. Beyle once said that the ingenuities and resourcefulness of the classic French drama reminded him of the nimbleness of a person dancing in chains. Miss Austen certainly danced in chains, but the agility with which she moved within the restriction was marvellous. The effect of a uniform parlance is to slur distinctions and the tendency of a formal diction is to crush vivacity. It was highly fortunate for Miss Austen's self-extrication from these difficulties that her discrimination in characters was extraordinary, and that in drawing character animation was her strong point. Observe the resilience of her faculty in the load it shoulders in the manipulation of a passage like the following:

"I see what you think of me," said he, gravely; "I shall make but a poor figure in your journal to-morrow."

"My journal."

"Yes; I know exactly what you will say. Friday, went to the Lower Rooms; wore my sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings, plain black shoes; appeared to much advantage, but was strangely harassed by a queer half-witted man, who would make me dance with him, and distressed me by his nonsense."

"Indeed, I shall say no such thing."

"Shall I tell you what you ought to say?"

"If you please."

"I danced with a very agreeable young man, introduced by Mr. King; had a great deal of conversation with him; seems a most extraordinary genius, hope I may know more of him. *That*, madam, is what I *wish* you to say."

"But perhaps I keep no journal."

"Perhaps you are not sitting in this room, and I am not sitting

by you. These are points in which a doubt is equally possible. Not keep a journal! How are your absent cousins to understand the tenour of your life in Bath without one? How are the civilities and compliments of every day to be related as they ought to be unless noted down every evening in a journal? How are your various dresses to be remembered and the particular state of your complexion, and curl of your hair to be described, in all their diversities, without having constant recourse to a journal? My dear madam, I am not so ignorant of young ladies' ways as you wish to believe me. It is this delightful habit of journalizing which largely contributes to form the easy style of writing for which ladies are so generally celebrated. Everybody allows that the talent of writing agreeable letters is peculiarly female. Nature may have done something, but I am sure it must be essentially assisted by the practice of keeping a journal."

"I have sometimes thought," said Catherine, doubtingly, "whether ladies *do* write so much better letters than gentlemen. That is, I should not think the superiority was always on our side."

"As far as I have had opportunity of judging, it appears to me that the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless, except in three particulars."

"And what are they?"

"A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar."

Observe that Mr. Tilney's style is as much heavier than Catherine's in mass as it is lighter in movement. His syntax at a ball outweighs that of many clergymen in the pulpit; but the more Jane Austen thickened her dough, the more she poured in her yeast, and the struggle between levity and gravity is exhilarating. Miss Austen both loses and profits by the test. In the absence of the load, the actual result might have been greater, but the demonstra-

tion of capacity would have been less. Of course the relatively happy issue is confined to the livelier characters; the solemn persons founder in their own verbosity.

There is another quality in Miss Austen's portrayal of life, for which, as I strongly suspect, she was not indebted to her faculty of observation. I have in mind the judiciousness which it is the pride and delight of nearly every person to exhibit in his kind and degree. I do not mean simply judgment; judgment is the underpinning of civilization, and its distribution in moderate amounts is fairly universal. What is peculiar in Miss Austen is the pomp and gusto with which this judicial faculty is exercised. The persons affect us like bureaux; they make a vocation of foresight; they pose as experts in life. The quality or its imitation is more or less pervasive. The starch is evident not only in Sir Thomas Bertram, where its accumulation is pardonable, but in his young son Edmund; even in Fanny Price, where much of the starch, under a well-known chemical analogy, has undergone a conversion into sugar, its aroma is unmistakable. I can hear the intonation of casuistry even in the frou-frou of Mrs. Elton's frivolous and vapid speech. If I hold my hand to my ear, I fancy I can even catch its attenuated echoes in the clatter and jingle of the scatter-brained Isabella Thorpe. Let any one compare these two young women with what a fribble and a flirt would

have been a hundred years earlier in Dryden or Etherege or a half-century later in Dickens or Thackeray, and he will be struck by the largeness of the difference. As in a theocratic organization the very scoundrels are pietists, so in the Jane Austen world the very fools are wiseacres. It must not be supposed that the amount of wisdom even in the exploited and favored characters bears any proportion to the amount of flourish with which the wisdom is set forth. The sense is sense for the most part, but its limitations both in depth and breadth are notable.

This attitude as the habit of a community is unknown to me in actual life. The responsibility with which two young girls in the security of isolation discuss the conduct of life is received with misgiving by a critic whose acquaintance with that species has been formed in America. No doubt the vanity of discretion is quite imaginable as a social formula, however thoroughly in one's own time and place it has been supplanted by the vanity of smartness. The literature of the age seems at first blush emphatic in Miss Austen's support. From Pope's sense in the early seventeen hundreds to Wordsworth's solemnities in the early eighteen hundreds, the art of behaving "like one well studied in a sad ostent to please his grandam" was practiced by the sages and professed by the madcaps of literature. Goldsmith's *Good-Natured Man* is a case in point.

Here the ripe baronet, Sir William Honeywood, is entitled by age and rank to the treasures of wisdom he exhibits, but the key to his intellectual coffers has clearly been filched by his prodigal nephew, who is all acuteness and discretion in the pursuit of thoughtlessness and extravagance. The young lady of the play, Miss Richland, might have chaperoned her own grandmother.

But this unanimity of literature is capable of two interpretations. Indeed, literature is a witness whose veracity is already discredited. That any young girl should talk—to go back, for an instant, to the previous point—as Elizabeth Bennet talked in the passage just quoted on page 149 is not only beyond the credible; it is beyond all temperance and decency in the incredible. Yet it is not so very much worse than the customary genteel speech of literature in its time. There is no reason why a literature that lyingly affirmed that birth in a good family and education at Eton and Oxford conferred the gift of talking like a book should not lyingly affirm its power to install its protégé in what might be defined as a professorship of good sense. All this is somewhat speculative, and the main reason for my skepticism—a skepticism into which I am not anxious to urge the reluctant or hesitating reader—is drawn once more from the correspondence of Miss Austen. In Jane Austen's letters good sense is never out of the way, but it is seldom to the fore, and never goes out for an

airing. With her heroes and heroines it is always driving through the country in a barouche-landau. These people are serious in fact, and still more serious in theory. With Miss Austen herself, as with most sensible people in our time, precisely the reverse is the case.

An example will clarify the point. Miss Austen's niece, Fanny Knight, wants advice as to an offer of marriage. For a spinster of thirty-nine the occasion was priceless. Here was a chance for "My dear Fanny's" *ad nauseam* (there are plenty of "My dear Fanny's" in *Mansfield Park*—three on four pages) for the parade of experience, the mouthing and mummery of good sense. Of all this not a vestige is discoverable. Jane's letters are easy and unpretending; they are vivacious; they are even jolly. At the same time they abound in care for Fanny and for Fanny's welfare. Even the graver letters are not unduly grave; the grief is not smothered in bombazine. Jane Austen may have been an exception among her family and circle, but on this point I am disposed to trust the letter-writer and impugn the novelist. I believe that the pragmatism of her fictions was a bid for respect, or, what is almost the same thing, an obeisance to respectability. When Martha Lloyd wanted Jane to buy a pair of shoes for her in Bath, Jane's reluctance was marked, and she adds to her protest the emphatic words: "At any rate they shall all have flat heels." No

wonder she refused high heels to Martha; she was too busy in providing them for the characters in her novels.

On Miss Austen's realism in this point my mind is still open, but there is another matter on which my convictions are immovable. In my review of individual characters in the several books I have often pointed out the fact of overcharge. I now wish to declare my belief that in the comic figures, which include so many of Miss Austen's liveliest and most famous characters, the *rule* is overcharge. Miss Austen was capable, as few writers have been capable, of shaded portraiture, and this fact in combination with the mildness of her plots and her pose as schoolmistress has obscured the cardinal fact that a large part of her best and best loved characterization is the untempered and strident characterization of comedy, the comedy of Molière, Sheridan, and Goldsmith. Macaulay, in a famous passage, thus exposes the garishness of Fanny Burney in contrast with the chastened half-lights of Jane Austen.

> In Cecilia, for example, Mr. Delvile never opens his lips without some illusion to his own birth and station; or Mr. Briggs, without some allusion to the hoarding of money; or Mr. Hobson, without betraying the self-indulgence and self-importance of a purseproud upstart; or Mr. Simkins, without uttering some sneaking remark for the purpose of currying favor with his customers; or Mr. Meadows, without expressing apathy and weariness of life; or Mr. Albany, without declaiming about the vices of the rich and the misery of the poor; or Mrs. Belfield,

without some indelicate eulogy on her son; or Lady Margaret, without indicating jealousy of her husband. Morrice is all skipping, officious impertinence, Mr. Gosport all sarcasm, Lady Honoria all lively prattle, Miss Larolles all silly prattle.

Now I intend to furnish a parallel to this passage from the sinless and adorable Miss Austen; and if I draw my examples from two novels instead of one, it must be remembered that Miss Burney's novels are longer and more thickly peopled than Miss Austen's. Here is my effort. Mrs. Jennings never opens her mouth without some low-bred allusion to courtship; nor Mrs. Palmer without some outgush of imbecile good-nature; nor Mr. Palmer without some laconic insult; nor Fanny Dashwood without the use of some mercenary manœuvre; nor Lucy Steele without some fawning and malicious calculation; nor Sir John Middleton without some display of gregarious joviality; nor Robert Ferrars without some betrayal of supercilious conceit; nor Mr. Bennet without some cynical pleasantry; nor Lady Catherine de Bourgh without some overbearing or interfering remark. Mrs. Bennet is all addleheaded worldliness, Lydia Bennet all boisterous levity, Mary Bennet all pompous verbosity, Georgiana Darcy all fluttered reticence. Of course these assertions are not literally true, but they are satisfyingly near to truth, and a satisfying nearness is quite as much as Macaulay attains in his indictment of the uniformities of Fanny Burney. Strange as it may appear, in this section

of her field, Miss Austen is to be reckoned among dashing and reckless artists, the artists who draw character as they drive nails by pounding with all their might upon one spot.

This is part of the truth—the neglected part; the other part is the fact that in another group of characters she is mistress, as perhaps no other artist in our literature has been mistress, of the restrained, the shaded, the impalpable. Macaulay's picture of her four young clergymen who are all alike and all unlike, though pressed rather far in certain phrases, is just in its main contention. It is easy to handle a character with handles; Miss Austen can dispense with that convenience. Put the neutral character beside the strongly marked, put Charlotte Collins beside her husband, put Kitty Bennet beside Lydia or Mary, put Charles Musgrove beside his wife, and you feel that in Miss Austen's palette the drabs are as significant as the purples. The milder figures on Miss Austen's canvas are finer and abler—I do not say stronger or even more valuable—than the outstanding ones, in much the same way that Seth Bede is a greater achievement than Adam, that Mrs. Tulliver is the solution of a greater difficulty than Mrs. Glegg. How Miss Austen, in whose temper, method, and style there is no shading, manages to get shade into her characters is a problem that I cannot solve; it is an instance of squaring the circle, or rather of rounding the square, the secret of which

I do not pretend to fathom. Miss Austen is prone to spend the delicacies of her workmanship on cheap materials, cheap, I hasten to explain, by the test of intellectual and moral values. As I have hinted, she rarely combines her most delicate and her most spirited work in the same portrait. I think, however, that it is quite possible to name a character who is as finely edged as any of her neuters and as vital, if not quite so vivid, as the most glaring of her exaggerations. That character is Emma Woodhouse.

Is this finer discrimination the result of complexity? Are Miss Austen's figures complex? At this point it behooves us to distinguish. There is something elusive in Miss Austen's presentations, and it is always possible that a property which we cannot name may have its source in an invisible complexity. But if complexity refers to ascertainable traits—traits which may be named and reached by a process of critical decomposition—I am disposed to think that Miss Austen surpasses all other novelists in the fewness of the traits out of which her persons are moulded. Take two of the young divines in whose diversification Macaulay exulted. What is there in Edward Ferrars but affection and diffidence? What trait can Henry Tilney boast of but winsomeness in raillery? After he has mocked daintily at Catherine two or three times, Henry is drained of significance. In my reviews of individual portraits I have noted the fact that the tune or air of a character is some-

times conveyed to us entire in the first few notes, and that *da capo* might fittingly stand for the remainder of the score. I have also noted Miss Austen's marvellous capacity for bestowing at least a spectrum of individuality on characters the whole account of whom is compressed into twenty or thirty lines. Mr. Hurst in *Pride and Prejudice* is a clear example.

Glance at any really complex character, Jane Eyre, for instance, and the differences from Miss Austen's method will be readily perceptible. Jane Eyre has powerful passions and a mighty will; even that relatively simple combination is unknown to Jane Austen. Capable of vehemence, Jane Eyre can school herself to long years of savorless and colorless routine. She is the kind of person to whom the education of a young girl may be securely committed, and she is also the kind of person to whom men are impelled to relate stories of their discarded mistresses. She can rally and advise the formidable St. John Rivers, can later on become the vassal of his relentless will, and can still later nerve herself to throw off that vassalage. She is demure as governess and as fiancée she is malapert. Even with complexities less difficult than these Miss Austen was scarcely qualified to grapple. Most readers would probably dissent from my own impression that Darcy is a failure, but I should command a much wider indorsement for the proposition that the

Crawfords with their cloven natures are only half successful, and that a two-sided character like Willoughby is rather a group of strokes than a picture.

Restrictions of this kind may not always impair the quality of Miss Austen's realism, but they limit its field. A second interesting limitation is the virtual suppression of the body as a factor in the delineations. Miss Austen's way is to summarize the physique in two or three main traits the specification of which is compressible into as many lines. In this proceeding the body is paid off, so to speak, and is expected to trouble an upright authoress no further. I do not mean that Miss Austen's people are ascetics or phantoms; on the contrary, the men have a mundane fondness for port, and the objections of the women to turkey and sweetbreads with asparagus are always removable with a little pressure. I mean that that sense of the present body as a spur to the imagination which belongs to Thackeray's Beatrix Esmond, to James's Lady Barbarina, to Meredith's Clara Middleton, and to Hardy's Eustacia Vye, is scarcely discoverable in Miss Austen's novels. The body is not an actor in the play. After specification the features vanish, and are almost never recalled except in relation to pallors and blushes, which are priceless as clews to invaluable "agitations."

When two people converse, there is usually no

shift of position, no interpretative gesture, no play of feature, no modulation of tone. Even the "she said's" and "he answered's" are often omitted, and the dialogue suffers a depilation not unlike that of the tonsured dialogue of Alfieri or an English morality. I do not assert that the speech is dull. We know from Chaucer's Monk and from daily observation that baldness often shines, and conversation in Miss Austen supports the induction.

Another conversational trait which has its part in simplifying Miss Austen's characters may be described, a little loosely, as generality or abstraction. The people in her books are as intensely particular, as vehemently personal, in their interests as people are everywhere in life itself and in all pictures of life which claim even an approximation to exactness. The talking of generalities, like the talking of literature, was merely a badge of caste, a point of ceremony; it was, nevertheless, obeyed with that zeal which ceremony so readily inspires in its disciples. Elizabeth and Anne Elliot are discussing the probability of their father's victimization by an uncomely but insidious woman.

"You must have heard him notice Mrs. Clay's freckles."

"There is hardly any personal defect," replied Anne, "which an agreeable manner might not gradually reconcile one to."

"I think very differently," answered Elizabeth, shortly, "an agreeable manner may set off handsome features, but can never alter plain ones."

In modern realism the last two speeches might read as follows:

> "Her manners are good," said Anne.
> "Manners," said Elizabeth with a sniff.

This roundness of period in which generalities dilate and globe themselves has much the same blurring effect on variations of character that the enforced adoption of the orotund by a group of open-air speakers would have upon the idiosyncracies of voice. The expression of difference by speech is limited. The conversation remains vigorous, and often brilliant, but it ceases to picture the character, or—to speak more temperately and accurately—a veil neither quite opaque nor quite transparent is dropped between us and the picture. A bodiless personality expresses itself in a bodiless diction. At this point I shall be very lucky, if even the liberal and amiable reader does not consign this volume to the fire, or, if no fire be at hand, to a place where the provision of that element is supposed to be unlimited and constant. The reader has a right to his indignation, but I cling to my thesis. My sentiment would be that of Themistocles when Eurybiades, the Spartan, lifted up his stick to inflict corporal chastisement on the presumptuous Athenian: "Strike, but hear me." Miss Austen is probably the most downright, the most positive, of all novelists in English, yet her method is the highly

abstract method of which one development is found in the ponderous tenuity of *Rasselas*, and another in the formless rarefaction of Mr. James's *Sacred Fount*. Her creations are not so much bodied forth as minded forth, but they are alive in the face of conditions which are the normal extinguishers of vitality. So much stronger was her nature than her method that the quality of her work may almost be called the antithesis of the quality of her method. She was an individualist of the first order, and individuality in her figures could survive the abatement or attenuation of corporal and concrete substance to an extent to which the length and breadth of literature hardly offers a parallel. The character like Tithonus might waste to a grain of a sand, but that grain would be flint.

There is another point in which the truth of the characterizations is liable to a grave deduction. She thought herself hostile to those

> Men that every virtue decks,
> And women models of their sex

to whom fiction has owed half its popularity. She writes to her niece Fanny: "Pictures of perfection, as you know, make me sick and wicked." We have seen that she expresses a measure of discontent with the faultless heroine of her own *Persuasion*. The two facts, the faultlessness and the discontent, taken together are significant. Miss

Austen virtuously prided herself on her aversion to the unqualified, but those who have read her novels and also her letters from Bath will understand me when I say that several of her own characters had their dwelling in Paragon Street. Nothing is easier than to despise perfection in the characters of other novelists. Fielding recoiled from Richardson's ineffable *Pamela*, but I should not like to undertake off-hand to name a fault in the wife of Captain Booth or in the sweetheart of Tom Jones. George Eliot in *Adam Bede* began with a plea for alloys and mixtures, but was destined to produce in *Daniel Deronda* a paragon who roused explosiveness in Stevenson. Stevenson did not draw Derondas, but, after preaching to others, I suspect that he himself became a castaway with John Hawkins on *Treasure Island*, if not with David Balfour in the Hebrides. The truth is that virtue is so insidious that the wariest novelist is not proof against its seductions. How does the case stand with Miss Austen?

Of Elinor Dashwood we might say what an American satirist said of Elinor's country that "when the vartoos died they made her heir." Colonel Brandon's worst offense is rheumatism. We concede a few faults to Elizabeth Bennet and her lover, though Elizabeth's are of the mildest type, and Darcy's resemble the folds in a table-cover, which disappear the moment it is spread out. But what is to be said in stay of sentence for the impeccable Jane Bennet?

The other Jane—Jane Fairfax—is almost as bad—I should say as good, but we are not required to like her unless we choose. The interval between Fanny Price and perfection is distressingly slight, and Anne Elliot is practically dismissed as hopeless by her creator. Edmund Bertram is allowed one little fault, but no such indulgence is vouchsafed to Mr. Henry Tilney.

Evil in many characters is equally unrelieved. The virtues have been so far used up on the paragons that no good trait is left for Fanny Dashwood, for Lucy Steele, for George Wickham, for Lydia Bennet, for Lady Catherine de Bourgh, for Mr. Collins, for General Tilney, for John Thorpe, for Isabella Thorpe, for Mr. Elliot, for Mrs. Elton. About Mrs. Norris the authors of the *Life and Letters* make the following remark:

> Mrs. Norris, we are told, would have done much better than Mrs. Price in her position. It must have given Jane Austen great pleasure to make this remark. None of her bad characters (except possibly Elizabeth Elliot) were quite inhuman to her, and to have found a situation in which Mrs. Norris might have shone would be [would have been?] a real satisfaction.

It is needless to comment on the methods of a novelist in whom a character is only saved from total inhumanity by a paragraph of eleven lines in the last quarter of the book.

This is one phase of the matter. There is another phase, smaller in bulk and less pronounced in quality,

but of much significance and of surpassing worth. As we have seen, Miss Austen was not strong in the divided character, but in what may be called the slanting character, the character that is remote both from the perpendicular and the horizontal, she had a rare and precious gift. The decent and self-respecting meanness of John Dashwood, the mixture of self-indulgence and obligingness in Charles Musgrove, receive little space or emphasis, but they are of that profound truth which is plumbed only here and there by the wisest and most penetrating fiction. The case of Emma Woodhouse is somewhat different. Here the character, excellent in the main, is weakened by frailties that are more damaging than grave, or, if the reader likes, more estranging than damaging. The plan requires that this character be endangered and safe-guarded at every moment, and the skill shown in the convoy is worthy of the sister of two admirals. Mr. John Knightley presents a third problem. He has an ill temper, not the agreeable and almost ingratiating ill temper which seasons the virtue of his uncompromising brother, but the sort of ill temper of which one might say, in mimicry of the Frenchman's censure of the murder of the duke d'Enghien, that it is worse than a fault, it is a nuisance. He really tries the reader, yet keeps his place in the reader's esteem—a process normal in life, but reserved in fiction for the attempered hand of the severe and ripened artist.

I shall quote a few passages which show Miss Austen's grasp of this doubleness, this circumflex, in life for which the dramatic craftsman is so prone to substitute the grave or the acute accent.

Charlotte herself was tolerably composed. She had gained her point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins, to be sure, was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it.

This may be questionable as ethics—it is certainly dismal as philosophy; but its art is consummate. Two passages from *Persuasion* may be cited.

He had very good spirits, which never seemed much affected by his wife's occasional lowness, bore with her unreasonableness sometimes to Anne's admiration, and upon the whole, though there was very often a little disagreement (in which she had sometimes more share than she wished, being appealed to by both parties) they might pass for a happy couple.

Lady Elliot had been an excellent woman, sensible and amiable, whose judgment and conduct, if they might be pardoned the youthful infatuation which had made her Lady Elliot, had never required indulgence afterwards. She had humoured, or softened, or concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability for seventeen years; and though not the very happiest being in the world herself, had found enough in her duties, her

friends, and her children, to attach her to life, and make it no matter of indifference to her when she was called on to quit them.

Miss Austen is clearly at home in that prevalent state of mind to which fiction so rarely adjusts itself—the state in which happiness is sufficiently clouded to lose all its brilliancy without losing all its worth. It sometimes seems as if the main business of life were to confute our expectations, to upset our theories, and to blunt our epigrams. Even this dictum is too epigrammatic to be true. The division of men into optimists and pessimists is at once the consequence and the evidence of the refusal of life to ally itself with either party.

In Miss Austen's standing as realist three elements must be noted—the conventionalist, the dramatist, and the observer. Convention was mighty in her, and influenced her conformity to truth. It not only affected her style and her ethics, but it made the whole form—not the spirit—of her conversation artificial, and—as I personally think—it warped realism by informing her novels with what one may call the odor of the seminar. The second force is the dramatist, working on an admirable ground of observed truth, but heightening the lights and blackening the shadows, producing integers of good and evil, intensifying and simplifying till nothing was left of the character but the exaggeration and reiteration of one or possibly two or three qualities—giving in

the end the truth, not of life, but of comedy. Last of all comes the observer, in the tempered and chastened exercise of a faculty whose compass has often been exaggerated, but the quality, the delightfulness, of which it would be difficult to overpraise.

PART III

THE WOMAN

CHAPTER IX

LIFE AND WAYS OF LIFE

In this final section I shall treat of Jane Austen's personality with glances at certain literary traits to which that personality is closely related.

Miss Austen is perhaps the poorest subject for biography of all notable persons who have lived since biography began to flourish. Her family was large, her acquaintance not small; she was part of a peering, listening, gossiping community; and forty-two years in one district and four towns should have supplied a field for the accumulation of reminiscence. But her life was barren of events; her fame, when it tardily arrived, was shy; and curiosity awoke only after its nutriment had vanished. She died in 1817; the memoir of her nephew, J. E. Austen-Leigh, published in 1870, was the first attempt to present her life in narrative. In respect of material that memoir is famished, though the grace and exquisite humility with which the little repast is served leave us obliged even by its meagreness. The taste and loyalty, if not the grace, of the memoir-writer was bequeathed to his son and grandson, William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, who published in 1913 the *Life and Letters of Jane Austen*. The life-

story yielded scarcely anything to further pressure; but, in view of Jane's own destitution on this score, a purse of facts, if I may hazard the expression, was made up in her behalf to which every ancestor, relative, and acquaintance was bidden to contribute his mite. More important was the access to the *Letters of Jane Austen*, published in 1884 by her grandnephew, Lord Brabourne, with explanations of every point within the editor's knowledge for which explanation was desirable or permissible. Apart from the novels, these letters are our chief datum for Miss Austen's character; they furnish us with a *victus*, if not a *vita*. Leslie Stephen, in the *Dictionary of National Biography* calls them trivial—a remark of which the seriousness is almost majestic. Addressed mainly to a sister, the *Letters* choose sisterly topics; but they paint a fashion of life in concise and pithy touches, and are crisped with a humor of which formal literature might be proud.

I shall dispense with the affectation of chronology in the few facts as to Miss Austen's life which I think it needful to set down. Her father, George Austen, born in 1731, held the living of Steventon in Hampshire from 1761 to 1801, and died in Bath in 1805. Her mother, Cassandra Leigh, a shrewd and humorous woman, after bringing eight children into the world, settled down into that state of health which permits one to enjoy the privileges of an invalid to the age of eighty-eight. Of this family

Jane was the sixth child. She had one sister, Cassandra, with whom her relations throughout her life were exquisite, and six brothers, only one of whom seems to have been overlooked in nature's generous bestowal of capacities and virtues. The eldest son, James, was a clergyman. Another son, Edward, was adopted by a rich landowner, whose fortune he inherited and whose name he took. Two other brothers, Francis and Charles, rose to admiralships in the English navy. Jane's favorite brother, Henry, was a brilliant and unstable character, who gave up orders to enter the militia, and who saw in the insolvency of his banking-house in later life a clear proof of his vocation for the ministry.

The family had many roots and many branches, was cohesive within itself and adhesive to its connections, was prone to marry and remarry, was lavish of births and sparing of deaths, had no prejudice against food and drink, and loved station, money, and office with an artlessness which may be taken as a partial set-off for its intensity. They were prone to those neighborships and clanships which demand for their maintenance both a certain tenderness and a certain toughness of the sensibilities. They had a healthy fondness for good times in which the younger daughter dutifully shared.

Miss Austen's love-affairs, so far as present evidence goes, present nothing that need detain or agitate the biographer. The industry of her rela-

tives has come upon traces of two flirtations, of which Jane herself speaks with a matter-of-fact and reassuring lightness. Her niece, Caroline, is voucher for another story of Jane's acceptance of an income and position overnight and her rejection next morning of the human being with whom these advantages were encumbered. There is still another pointless story of a young man attractive to Jane who was expected to reappear and whose failure to meet expectations was the effect of a rendezvous with death. There is every reason to believe that Miss Austen in her youth had a girl's fondness for society, attention, and, very possibly, flirtation, and there is no reason to suppose that her aversion to matrimony was of the kind which suitable pressure from an eligible quarter would have failed to conquer. Her person is said to have been very attractive. I quote from the author of the memoir.

> Her figure was rather tall and slender, her step light and firm, and her whole appearance expressive of health and animation. In complexion she was a clear brunette with a rich colour; she had full round cheeks, with mouth and nose small and well formed, bright hazel eyes, and brown hair forming natural curls close round her face. If not so regularly handsome as her sister, yet her countenance had a peculiar charm of its own to the eyes of most beholders.

Miss Austen's later years were spent in Bath, Southampton, and the village of Chawton in Hampshire, in which Edward Knight—formerly Edward

Austen—had offered an asylum to his mother and sisters. The Austen novels were written rapidly in two groups, parted by a singular hiatus of eleven sterile years. The first group, comprising *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Northanger Abbey*, was written in the order named between 1796 and 1798. The second group, comprising *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*, was written between 1811 and 1816. The publication was much more compressed than the writing. The six novels all came out between 1811 and 1818. Jane Austen died in Winchester, on July 18, 1817, at the age of forty-one, of a malady which her physicians could apparently neither cure nor name. Her grave is in Winchester cathedral.

In the dearth of biography I shall use the letters as the basis of a sketch of Jane's habits and interests, not shrinking from a little detail, which is more likely to surprise than to fatigue the reader.

Jane Austen was much too substantial a person to affect any indifference to food. She is specific in the expression of her attachment to cold souse which she "devours" with the approval and assistance of her two nieces. I trust that this announcement will arm the reader for the still more depressing information that at a certain supper toasted cheese was ordered expressly on her account. Her mother calls her a very good housekeeper, an estimate in which Jane cordially concurs, adding that she always pro-

vides such things as please her own appetite, "which I consider the chief merit in housekeeping." She inclines to haricot mutton, to ragout veal, and to experimental ox-cheeks, in which little dumplings are affectionately secreted. She invites the physician to dinner, and "was not ashamed at asking him to sit down to table, for we had some pease-soup, a spare-rib, and a pudding." "We are to kill a pig soon," she remarks with rural directness and housewifely foresight. The turkey *redux* which we think so characteristic of Thanksgiving in America has clearly broadened slowly down from precedent to precedent, for Jane Austen has a jest at a French cook's expertness in this particular. The departure of guests is a welcome relief from the torments of rice puddings and apple dumplings, which may have been the clichés of cookery, abhorrent to the true stylist in housekeeping.

In travelling Jane's correspondence and her bodily frame are nourished on the same fare. At Devizes, as Cassandra is punctiliously informed, they had asparagus and a lobster, and cheesecakes that made the town memorable to the children. At Dartford, the absence of oyster sauce for the boiled fowl is confided to the same sympathetic ear. At Henry Austen's a French cook receives due plaudits for a most comfortable dinner of soup, fish, bouillée, partridges, and an apple tart. Miss Austen has a true housekeeper's interest in prices. Bath is vir-

tuous in the point of meat (only eightpence a pound), but its charges for salmon are iniquitous.

It must not be supposed that Jane, in her solicitude about food, becomes oblivious of the claims of drink. Her affection for wine is unconcealed. In a letter written January 24, 1817, when already stricken with disease, she wants a recipe for some excellent orange wine made out of Seville oranges. At her brother Edward's she writes: "I shall eat ice and drink French wine, and be above vulgar economy." At Henry's we hear of a midnight participation in "soup and wine and water" (before they go to their "holes"). She writes from her brother Edward's in 1813: "By-the-bye, as I must leave off being young, I find many *douceurs* in being a sort of *chaperon*, for I am put on the sofa near the fire, and can drink as much wine as I like."

At an earlier date she writes: "I believe I drank too much wine last night at Hurstbourne; I know not how else to account for the shaking of my hand to-day." This may be only a humorous pretense, but there is little reason to suppose that the reality would have disquieted the writer.

Jane did not confine her partialities to imported *liqueurs* (they had *liqueurs* even in her day). The authoress whose peculiarity in literature was her fondness for the English domestic home-brew was true to her principles in the matter of drinks. She likes mead, and writes in 1813: "I find time in the

midst of port and Madeira to think of the fourteen bottles of mead very often." She turns from the perfunctory mention of a pianoforte to the heartfelt cry: "We hear now that there is to be no honey this year. Bad news for us. We must husband our present stock of mead." Mead divided her affections with spruce beer. It was a period in which the variety of beverages at the same meal was sometimes interestingly great. Mrs. Austen reports a breakfast in which tea, coffee, and chocolate were served. Jane's niece Anna returns from an evening in which sillabub, tea, and coffee were the suite or the escort of a hot supper. Jane is very kind as a rule to her niece Fanny, but she will stand no juvenile nonsense on the subject of the consumption of tea. "As to Fanny and her twelve pounds in a twelvemonth, she may talk till she is as black in the face as her own tea, but I cannot believe her—more likely twelve pounds to a quarter."

If Jane was English in her respect for aliment, she was woman in her emphasis on dress. She is no more frivolous in her care for clothes than she is animal in her stress on nutriment; both are merely articles in the treaty which she made at the outset with things as they are. In relation to clothes her sentiment shows more of the zeal of the partisan than of the gravity of the devotee. They mix good-naturedly enough with more ethereal interests. "I have read the *Corsair*, mended my petticoat, and

have nothing else to do." Literature and dress are associated after another fashion in the following mention of a cap. "It will be white satin and lace, and a little white flower perking out of the left ear, like Harriet Byron's feather." Jane's interest in caps is inextinguishable. She wears a black cap to a ball to the probable admiration of everybody in the room, even at the time of life when she could dance twenty dances without fatigue and imagine herself dancing for a week together. She and her sister were thought to have taken to caps and the other ensigns of middle age earlier than their years or their looks required.

She was not, however, indifferent to fashion. "I find my straw bonnet looking very much like other people's, and quite as smart." She enumerates with gusto the fruits discoverable on the hats of the fashionable world in Bath, grapes, cherries, plums, apricots, even a bunch of strawberries. Nevertheless, there are moments of wilfulness when she dallies with the thought of nonconformity. "I wear my gauze gown to-day, long sleeves and all. I shall see how they succeed, but as yet I have no reason to suppose long sleeves are allowable." She is resigned to the observance of the proprieties. When the Duke of Gloucester dies, the mourning gives importance to the death. "I suppose everybody will be black for the D. of G. Must we buy lace, or will ribbon do?" She is girlish enough at

thirty-eight to call gowns sweet. "They are so very sweet by candle light." She can satirize effusiveness over dress without in the least renouncing her share in the object of her satire. "I have got your cloak home, which is quite delightful—as delightful at least as half the circumstances which are called so."

She has a rather piquant fashion of personifying articles of clothing. "I took the liberty a few days ago of asking your black velvet bonnet to lend me its cawl, which it very readily did." "I have found your white mittens. They were folded up within a clean nightcap, and send their duty to you." She takes an unaffected and unapologizing interest in all the little womanly shifts and crafts by which appearances are sustained and incomes husbanded. Evening gowns are made into morning gowns. The outer gown is transformed into a petticoat. "We are all busy making Edward's shirts, and I am proud to say that I am the neatest worker of the party." A frank and humorous readiness in the grapple with any of the little homely exigencies of a life that amused her almost as much as it bored her is characteristic of Jane Austen everywhere.

She is not uncritical of the dress of other people. The right to censure other people's dress is the recompense for the hours of anxiety given to one's own. "Tom Lefroy has but one fault, which time will, I trust, entirely remove—it is that his morning

coat is a great deal too light. He is a very great admirer of Tom Jones, and therefore wears the same coloured clothes, I imagine, which he did when he was wounded." She appears to have favored temperance in the colors of her own apparel, and some pink shoes are referred to with virtuous misgiving.

Jane has a practical woman's interest in the problems of housing, bedding, and transporting other people. "Pray where did the boys sleep?" she asks in a letter to her sister with the curiosity of a New England housekeeper. The benefits of her criticism are not withheld from improvements in the shrubbery or repairs in the house. Her attitude toward servants is resignedly skeptical. There are indications that the rebellious tolerance and smouldering protest which sometimes seems almost the *mutual* attitude of mistress and servant in America had its prototypes in Jane Austen's England.

A woman to whom the fact meant so much would affect no delicate indifference to money, and the letters and novels agree in testifying to the weight that Jane Austen gave to pounds. Money is never lightly spoken of, either by the most sensible or the most romantic persons in her books, and even people like Elinor Dashwood and Edward Ferrars, whose love is sincere and profound, are perfectly clear as to the relation of income to well-being. So far there is no ground for criticism. There is nothing sordid or base in the perception that a necessity, sordid

itself or even base, if you insist, is a necessity. Even spirituality may innocently note a fact, but Miss Austen's interest in money is very far from stopping at this point. I wish to speak with measure of a frame of mind of which measure was a prime characteristic, but I think we may say that Miss Austen's attitude toward money, while neither idolatrous nor abject, is definable as homage. She was neither a Fanny Dashwood nor a Mrs. Norris, but money was for her one of the great good facts of life in the savor and brightness of which her imagination fondly rested. She says in one letter: "I shall keep my ten pounds to wrap myself up in." The reference is naturally to apparel, but I think Jane would have been quite capable of nestling cosily into the warm wrappage of a snug income. "My father is doing all in his power to increase his income by raising his tithes, etc., and *I do not despair* of getting very nearly six hundred a year" (the italics are mine). "We have now pretty well ascertained James's income to be eleven hundred pounds, curate paid, which makes us very happy" (italics mine). This is the idyl of the cash-box; this is the *Faithful Shepherdess* in a new guise.

> Sing his praises that doth keep
> Our flocks from harm,
> Pan, the father of our sheep;

In a family of this sort the loss of a legacy cures any grief that might have been evoked by the loss

of the testator. Jane is suffering from a bilious attack when the news of her uncle's disposition of his property is revealed to her by indiscreet relatives. "I am ashamed to say that the shock of my uncle's will brought on a relapse." The touch that follows is delectable: "My mother has borne the forgetfulness of *her* extremely well" (the italics are Jane's). "'Forgiveness,' said Mr. Pecksniff, 'entire and pure forgiveness is not incompatible with a wounded heart; perchance when the heart *is* wounded it becomes a greater virtue.'"

Jane's objection to playing cards for money is characteristic. "There were two pools at commerce, but I would not play more than one, for the stake was three shillings, and I cannot afford to lose that twice in an evening." It is almost needless to observe that in this circle the getting or not getting of a frank is among the small poignancies of life. Nothing awakens tenderness like a gift of money. The very person of the donor is renovated to the grateful vision. "I have this moment received 5*l.* from *kind, beautiful Edward*" (italics mine). The possibility—or rather probability—that Jane is jocular in such expressions must be punctiliously allowed for; but even in the act of allowance one must remember that humor in such cases is the excuse for sincerity quite as often as it is the excuse for insincerity.

If the above paragraphs produce the impression that Miss Austen was grasping or parsimonious,

they have been unskilfully written. The delicacy—the interest—of the situation lies in the fact that Miss Austen was all that these paragraphs imply without being either grasping or parsimonious. The thought of money raised in her mind a glow not unlike that which the sight of fire awakens in a chilly person in a fickle climate; that glow does not imply that its owner will monopolize the cheer of the hearth or will be niggardly of coals to freezing neighbors. Such a feeling in relation to money indicates nothing worse than the abeyance of lethargy of those higher spiritual interests which, in women like George Eliot and Mrs. Browning, preoccupy the imagination and the feelings, and reduce money to the condition of a railway ticket—a thing to be at once guarded and despised. Miss Austen made few or no efforts to acquire money. A realistic estimate of publishers led her to accept contentedly rather small returns for literary products of extraordinary value. That she could be generous both in act and heart is evinced in the following quotation: "Mrs. Deedes is as welcome as May to all our benevolence to her son; we only lamented that we could not do more and that the 50*l.* we slipped into his hand at parting was necessarily the limit of our offering."

Miss Austen's esteem for family was large, and Elizabeth Bennet's defiant cry, "I am a gentleman's daughter," was doubtless only a proud echo of the

unuttered boast of the daughter of George Austen and Cassandra Leigh. It does not appear, however, that she set a high value on rank and title as things distinct from blood, or that the difference between high blood and good blood impressed her as momentous. Rank in her novels hardly rises higher than the baronetcy, and her baronets, Sir William Lucas, Sir John Middleton, Sir Thomas Bertram, and Sir Walter Elliot, are guiltless of any tendency to monopolize the talents or the virtues. Poor Lady Catherine de Bourgh is worse mauled than almost any other victim of Miss Austen's none too lenient satire, and as to the Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter, the rustle of whose skirts and whose stationery is audible in a chapter or two of *Persuasion*, they are cavalierly dismissed with the observation that they were "nothing."

Rank and money stood on different footings for Miss Austen. Her hard sense drew an immitigable distinction between the solid earth of which gold is an extract and the air out of whose fluid and impalpable substance such breaths as earl, marquis, and duke are cheaply and effortlessly drawn. She was not in the least overwhelmed by the consent of the *de facto* sovereign of England to receive the dedication of a novel, and the impassive formula, *To the Prince Regent*, shows no cleavage in her impenetrable reserve. In the gregarious and comprehensive social life of the county in Miss Austen's

day lords seem to have associated with commoners on easy and liberal, if not precisely equal, terms, and the novelist mastered the art of mentioning a peer without a simper or a tremor. Jane's mother was the great-granddaughter of a lord, Jane's brother Francis became a baronet, his wife had cousinships among lords, Jane's first cousin married a French count, Jane's niece married a baronet, and the grand-nephew who edited her letters is a lord. The imposture of nobility—meaning by that simply its failure to equalize its talents or its virtues with its rank—would soon have been pierced by an observer so keen, in circumstances so propitious to observation. The theory put forth by a character in Chaucer that lords are "half-goddes in this world here" received no indorsement from Miss Austen's invincible common sense.

Jane's indifference to politics was total; her own nephew can get no further than the surmise that she shared the mild Toryism of her family. The Napoleonic era thundered vainly to her serene deafness. In one letter she exclaims: "What weather, and what news." Her biographers conjecture that the news is the Battle of Leipsic. The dedication to the Battle of Leipsic of half a sentence (a sentence of five words) the other half of which is occupied with a eulogy of the weather is as original as anything in *Pride and Prejudice*. The navy, through its provision of sustenance for two Austens, ranks rather

more highly in the scale of institutions. In *Persuasion* the navy once becomes the subject of conversation, and questions such as the admission of lady passengers to a warship or the wisdom of an admiral's wife in sharing the voyages of her husband are discussed with appropriate gravity. One half recalls the type of religious question which interested the editor of a congeries of periodicals and newspapers in Arnold Bennett's *What the Public Wants:* "Shall lady parishioners give presents to curates?" It is pleasant, moreover, to reflect that alertness of mind can always find something of interest in the most sterile periods of the most lifeless institutions. The British navy could furnish enlivening topics to Jane Austen even amid the tediums of Aboukir and the nullities of Trafalgar.

On Jane's accomplishments her relatives are not insistent. She is said to have excelled in needlework and in penmanship, and her skill in games was the despair of her childish antagonists and imitators. Her fondness for art was not immoderate. Drawing as a drawing-room appurtenance or, to put the case a little differently, the pencil as one of the blunter shafts in Cupid's quiver, is sparingly visible in her novels; but her remark in a letter that in an art gallery the spectators diverted her attention from the pictures is instructive to the perspicacious. The woman who would read Southey's *Life of Nelson,* if it mentioned her brother Frank, would naturally

find the chief interest of an exhibition in a small portrait of Mrs. Bingley. Something is said of a sweet voice and of practice on the pianoforte, but Jane's own repudiation of musical taste was enjoyably robust. She says of a popular singer: "That she gave me no pleasure is no reflection upon her, nor, I hope, upon myself, being what Nature made me in that article." She has an undisguised fondness for persons whose impatience of music is undisguised. "I liked her for being in a hurry to have the concert over and get away." Apparently, she went little to the theatre, and she certainly had not the temper of the true theatre-goer for whom the calamity of being disappointed of a play far outweighs the mere misfortune of being disappointed in one. Kean, then in his first glory, entirely conquers her, but the other actors are put off with reservations and tepidities.

Neither the letters nor the biographies support the idea that Miss Austen was a systematic or sedulous reader. Hours of reading are scantly noted, and hours *for* reading belong to a world into which her cautious imagination never peeped. She read what fell in her way, or what the easy standards of a considerate world imposed upon a clergyman's daughter. She speaks once of her "dear Dr. Johnson," and a jocular project of marriage with George Crabbe, whom she sincerely and appropriately admired, was shadowed by a doubt as to the existence of

a vacancy. She seems to have liked Cowper, though the line which haunted Fanny Price in her Portsmouth exile, "With what intense desire she wants her home," is surely as pedestrian a line as ever cumbered the remembrance of a lover of poetry. Another phrase of Cowper's about "syringa ivory pure" does more credit both to poet and reader. She reads Scott's poems as they emerge. In June, 1808, she is still unconverted by *Marmion*, but in January, 1809, she has reached the point of admiring her own generosity in despatching her copy to her brother Charles. She is rather captious with Scott. "Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. It is not fair. He has fame and profit enough as a poet, and should not be taking the bread out of the mouths of other people." "I do not like him, and do not mean to like *Waverley* if I can help it, but fear I must."

The above passage is charmingly illustrative of a certain flexibility in Miss Austen's temper, which is often more or less concealed by the positiveness of her language. She had a woman's playful self-will, but even in the heyday and riot of her caprice she foresees its final subjection to a masculine equity. She has all manner of unreasoned dislikes, which she relinquishes with the most admirable candor and the most engaging reluctance.

To resume the topic from which I was lured away by the tempting observation in the last paragraph,

Jane remarked once not over-seriously that she had made up her mind to like no novels really but Miss Edgeworth's, her niece's, and her own. According to her nephew, her knowledge of *Sir Charles Grandison* was minute, an assertion which has two references to Harriet Byron in the letters on its side, but which I illogically decline to believe, with that faith in my unfaith which is one of the curious tattooings of human nature. She says once to her sister, in allusion to Miss Burney's *Cecilia*, "Remember that Aunt Cassandras are quite as scarce as Miss Beverleys." She recommends *Corinna* to a certain deaf Mr. Fitzhugh, but there is no evidence in the correspondence that her acquaintance with French belles-letters was more than respectable in amount or less than respectable in quality. Fielding is too much the stable-boy for her taste. She knew the *Spectator* and its progeny, and drew her history, no doubt in circumspect amounts, from the approved founts of Goldsmith, Hume, and Robertson. When she undertakes to read *Modern Europe* with her niece Fanny, something always occurs to delay or curtail the proposed reading. The discomfiture of plans of this kind for self-culture is among the favorite recreations of destiny.

One instinctively trusts Miss Austen's criticism of novels, even where one's ignorance of the book in question is complete. Nothing could be more unassuming, nothing could be less responsible or judi-

cial, than these criticisms, yet we feel a basic, an involuntary, equipoise which no wilfulness or subjectivity in the critic's conscious attitude could derange. The letters to her niece Anna on Anna's unpublished novel contain remarks which in their unconfirmed sanity are so convincing that verification, if verification were feasible, would seem almost an impertinence.

There are allusions to chestnut-planting in Miss Austen's letters, and mention is made of two roots of heart's ease, "one yellow and one purple," the references to which in my note-book are characteristically flanked by two other references, one to "asparagus, lobster and cheese" and the other to "ten pair of worsted stockings and a shift." It is nature drafted into the service of man, nature as the ornament and instrument of a vicarage, that is brought before us in scant and scattering allusion in these letters. In the novels the situation is not so very different, but a distinction must be made between the earlier group of novels from which nature is practically excluded and the later group in which like a well-bred villager she is allowed at cautious intervals to make a modest courtesy to her betters. In *Mansfield Park* a sentence or two here and there makes a rather formal, but not ungraceful or insincere, mention of Fanny Price's interest in spring, and in *Persuasion* matters are so far advanced that a whole paragraph—*almost* a whole paragraph—is

squandered on the charms of Lyme. The advance is readily explicable. Between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* nature had "come out." She had not only received the solemn vouchers of that socially questionable preacher and hermit, William Wordsworth, but the ban of rusticity had been finally lifted by the patronage of Walter Scott and Lord Byron. Miss Austen was born too early to have an articulate feeling for nature; not too early in time, for she was arithmetically younger than Scott or Wordsworth, but in time as related to scant education and unliterary surroundings. The love of nature has its own springtime in the centuries: when Miss Austen began to write, the frost was not yet out of the ground; at the date of *Persuasion* it was too late to plant a garden.

Mr. Howells, in an Easy-Chair paper, has spoken of the kind conscience and the tender affection of Miss Austen, and goes on to draw a picture of amiable self-dedication to the interests of friends and kinsfolk at which, I think, Jane Austen would have smiled. Jane's affections in certain quarters, particularly toward her sister and brothers and their descendants, were real and deep—were in fact the stuff and fibre of her life, but a robustness which abjured sentimentality and almost banished sentiment was their sanative and fortifying property. Her friends outside of the family were apparently few, and she seems to have conformed to that very

human, if also rather barbarous, custom which solidifies friendships by the dismemberment of acquaintance. In the raids which Jane made upon a defenseless society the booty, as the following passage from the letters will clearly show, was considerable.

There were very few beauties, and such as there were, were not very handsome. Miss Iremonger did not look well, and Mrs. Blount was the only one much admired. She appeared exactly as she did in September, with the same broad face, diamond bandeau, white shoes, pink husband, and fat neck. The two Miss Coxes were there: I traced in one the remains of the vulgar, broad-featured girl who danced at Enham eight years ago; the other is refined into a nice composed-looking girl, like Catherine Bigg. I looked at Sir Thomas Champneys and thought of poor Rosalie; I looked at his daughter, and thought her a queer animal with a white neck. Mrs. Warren, I was constrained to think a very fine young woman, which I much regret. She danced away with great activity. Her husband is ugly enough, uglier even than his cousin John; but he does not look so very old. The Miss Maitlands are both prettyish, very like Anne, with brown skins, large dark eyes, and a good deal of nose. The General has got the gout, and Mrs. Maitland the jaundice. Miss Debary, Susan, and Sally, all in black, but without any statues, made their appearance, and I was as civil to them as circumstances would allow me.

This passage, in which, at times, humanity seems viewed almost as *meat*, has its pabulum for the most obsequious biographer. Miss Austen did not live to see the publication of *Vanity Fair*. But had fate indulged her to that extent, I doubt if she would have felt any rancor toward that other maiden aunt who

remarked after a dinner: "Come to my dressing-room, Becky, and let us abuse the company." The state of the case is fairly clear. Miss Austen's demands were rather exigent; the society in which she moved was apparently a jumble; and the satirist in her clamored for his rations. Jane's compassion would not allow him to go hungry. Her candor does not blench at the sight of a tombstone. Mrs. W. K. is just dead, and Jane had no idea that anybody liked her, and proceeds forthwith to the choice of a successor. In those days there was apparently a great deal of perfunctory mourning balanced by a great deal of spontaneous persiflage. We are told of "a gentleman in a buggy, who, on minute examination, turned out to be Dr. Hall—and Dr. Hall in such very deep mourning that either his mother, his wife, or himself must be dead." With many persons a bad cough means a truce to asperities or jocularities in relation to the sufferer. Jane writes in this fashion: "My aunt has a very bad cough—do not forget to have heard about *that* when you come—and I think she is deafer than ever."

In writing to Cassandra Jane Austen remarks: "A better account of the sugar than I could have expected. I should like to have you break some more." I think Jane's benevolence was a hard sugar, the loaf or block sugar of former days, so hard that it needed crushers or solvents to convince the tongue of its obdurate sweetness. She was no person to

take the world into her lap. She scarcely fondled even her relatives. Her love for Cassandra had a beauty to which the ugly and the pretty would have been almost equally antithetic. If she sends "infinities of love," the hyperbole comports itself like a memorandum. She does once exclaim: "Sweet, amiable Frank," but adds: "Why does *he* have a cold too?" For colds the use of sirups is notorious. The general absence of criticism of her own family is remarkable in a person of quick eyesight and brusque tongue. Jane Austen liked her lot in life, and that life was mostly kinsfolk; hers was the temper for which the *donnée* in the dapper parlance of criticism or the deal in the homelier language of the card-table was final and authoritative.

I think it was this quiet finality in the acceptance of current restraints that made Jane Austen's moral life at the same time impeccable and vacant. Her letters never show the slightest moral agitation, the slightest moral difficulty. There is no record of a duty arduous enough to make its fulfilment exhilarating, of a rebellion strong enough to make its chastisement dramatic. For Jane Austen the dividing line in conduct ran rather between sense and folly than between good and evil, and the very titles of her novels are advertisements of her adhesion to this view. The lesson of *Sense and Sensibility* is clearly prudential, and *Pride and Prejudice* is obviously a rebuke to the indiscretions rather than

sins which are held up to disapproval in its alliterative and pedagogic title. There is guilt as well as folly in both novels, but the object is evidently not to put virtue into immoral Willoughbys and Wickhams, but sense into thoughtless Lydias and Mariannes. The wolf is assumed to be incorrigible, but we must do what we can for Red Ridinghood. Miss Austen, in this point, has a certain affinity with Molière, whose *Tartuffe*, to furnish only one example, exposes the hypocrites in the endeavor to instruct the dupes. In *Northanger Abbey* folly—romantic folly—is again the object of reproof; the conversion of the Isabella Thorpes in England is plainly not the incentive to the recital of Isabella's perfidy. In *Mansfield Park* the references to morality are emphatic, but the exciting cause is that participation of a few intimate friends in strictly private theatricals in which the reader of our own day could hardly be coaxed into perceiving even an imprudence. The moral of *Emma* is implicit in the following words: "The real evils of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much of her own way, and a disposition to think too well of 'herself.'" *Persuasion* illustrates the folly of listening too meekly to the counsels of your elders in affairs of the heart.

Miss Austen assumed virtue to be normal and prevalent, and vice, where it showed itself, to be practically beyond cure. Her attitude toward reprobates is by no means unindulgent; she endows

them liberally with attractions, and allows her virtuous Elinor Dashwoods, Elizabeth Bennets, and Anne Elliots to qualify their disapprobations with curious, though half reluctant, lenities. I think that the daughter of the vicar of Steventon felt toward these gay Lotharios very much as that other eminently respectable person, the sheriff of Selkirk, felt toward the Roderic Dhus and Bertrams, the Rob Roys and Redgauntlets, with whom he blackened and brightened his romantic pages. I suspect that in Jane's world virtue, as virtue was understood, was so plentiful, and sensible and agreeable people were so relatively few that she had a difficulty in renouncing the latter on account of their insufficiency in the point of morals.

It is unlikely that ideas of this sort ever influenced Miss Austen's conduct, but their very failure to affect her conduct may have strengthened their hold upon her feelings. "Eliza has seen Lord Craven at Barton. . . . She found his manners very pleasing indeed. The little flaw of having a mistress now living with him at Ashdown Park seems to be the only unpleasing circumstance about him." The "little" is irony beyond a doubt, but irony in such a case is leniency; manners are powerful with women, especially where they are scarce, and the Lovelaces of the period no doubt found their stoutest allies in the boorish Solmeses who posed as competitors. Here are a few remarks on a certain Mr. Lushington:

"He is quite an M. P., very smiling, with an exceeding good address and readiness of language. I am rather in love with him. I dare say he is ambitious and insincere." Apart from her serious and loyal family life the social world—the little world in which, as appearances are the realities, so manners are the virtues—was Jane's world.

If in Jane Austen's life morality is tacit, religion, at least religious feeling, is practically null. Allusions even to the apparel and process of religion are comparatively scant; church-going is rarely mentioned and never stressed; she is pleased once that two headstrong young nephews have taken the sacrament. Except in formal phrases like "God bless you," the name of God scarcely occurs in the correspondence. Plainly we have here to deal with an unpresuming divinity, a modest and circumspect Providence, who never oversteps the limits assigned to his function by the foresight of a judicious establishment. Jane was a decent, docile, worldly woman by whom the paternal cult was accepted without a shadow of question, an atom of feeling, or a trace of display. It required no urgency to induce her to respect an institution to which so many exemplary relatives were indebted for their sustenance.

In *Sense and Sensibility* the entrance of a young man into holy orders as the prelude and stepping-stone to his entrance into the substantial and interesting state of matrimony is accepted by Miss

Austen with a wholeheartedness which forestalls indorsement, and not a drop of ink is wasted in condonation of the young man's total want of religious feeling or vocation. Even the admirable Edmund Bertram, in the very act of rebuking the levities of the worldly Miss Crawford, calmly admits that his father's control of a desirable living had influenced his decision to enter the church. Why not? He really likes the church. One recalls a satirical gibe of Miss Austen's to the effect that all heiresses are beautiful. In the earlier and cruder legends of the Holy Grail that vessel was often called on to provide corporal sustenance for companies of devout and starving people. I am sure the arrangement commended itself to the Jane Austens of that artless day. Singular combinations whisk themselves in and out of these gay and caustic letters. "Mr. Brecknell is very religious, and has got black whiskers."

I cannot but feel regret that the absence of religious feeling and of poetical feeling in Jane Austen's constitution should have been equal and parallel. As Mr. George Santayana has shown, poetry and religion have latent affinities, and often minister kindred nutriment in diverse forms to unlike spirits. The removal of both is a source of aridity.

CHAPTER X

LIABILITIES AND ASSETS

I THINK it well at this point to gather up the limitations noted in the last chapter, and to add a few others so obvious as to require no proof. That Jane Austen's field was restricted her very idolaters admit, but the extent of that restriction can be realized only by a summary of the particulars. Certain elements in the novel have arisen since her day, and to note their absence in her work is demarcation, not disparagement. It would be equally silly and captious to blame Miss Austen for not dealing in politics with Mrs. Humphry Ward, in sexual adjustments with Madame Sarah Grand, in artistic endeavor with Mrs. Edith Wharton, or in spiritistic phenomena with Miss E. S. Phelps, now Mrs. Ward. The blamelessness of the restriction, however, does not in the least contract its area. The next great curtailment of material relates to a point in which her acquittal must be equally complete, if not equally rapid. She cannot be blamed for not forestalling George Sand or Charlotte Brontë in the field of labor difficulties or economic readjustments, though in her own day a woman whom she greatly admired was already beckoning fiction to this laborious and hardy

enterprise in *Castle Rackrent*. These things did not lie in Jane Austen's way, and forbearance was sagacity.

Miss Austen's forbearances, however, did not stop at things that lay outside her path. Landscape was certainly a part of her experience, and its treatment in fiction would not have been anomalous or hazardous in a successor of Mrs. Radcliffe. Yet landscape is barely visible, and is anything but influential in Miss Austen's work. Again, the physical frame and process of life, its food, drink, clothes, lodging, and conveyance, was exposed to her view; her letters show that her grasp of this material was robust; and the few touches of this kind which are sparingly and cautiously admitted into her novels are of a vividness which sharpens our regret for their infrequency. This was not alien ground on which she declined to trespass; it was ground of her own which she refused to cultivate.

She confined herself, again, to what might be called, a little loosely, one social class, the educated class which includes the landowners and the professional men, and which, even when it bewails its poverty, keeps servants and horses as guarantees of caste. Miss Austen's likeness to Thackeray and divergence from Thackeray in this point are both significant. Thackeray's world, like hers, is genteel, but is widened by the inclusion of nobles, and, more profitably and notably, by the welcome bestowed on

those persons who, in the form of direct service or purveyorship, are adjacent and subjacent to the propertied and educated folk. The plebs has only to put on a livery in order to find instant and cordial admission to the pages of the creator of Mr. Jeames Yellowplush. But even this passport is ineffectual in the fiction of Jane Austen. That she could have handled this class with fidelity and force is sufficiently evinced by her success in the treatment of analogous material in the Portsmouth episode in *Mansfield Park*, although she traverses these sordid alleys in her manorial work with an apparent elevation both of skirt and nostril which I hesitate to accept as characteristic of her mind. Be that as it may, Miss Austen has again made a large sacrifice of available and profitable material.

Once more, it is very curious that Miss Austen should not have anticipated Louisa Alcott and Mrs. Whitney in the emphasis they gave to that domesticity which plays in Miss Austen's novels a part so grossly, almost ludicrously, disproportionate to the part it played in her own life. Her love for Cassandra was probably her great experience, but the loves of Elinor and Marianne, of Jane and Elizabeth, tender and touching as they undoubtedly are, are portrayed in a subordination to courtship which seems to have been viewed as inevitable and final. The affection between William and Fanny Price affords a juster version of the compass of such relations in her own

life, but at Mansfield that affection is scarcely domestic, and the space it receives is scarcely liberal. It is remarkable that Jane Austen never drew a child; the young Prices or Middletons or Musgroves cannot be said to be drawn. These young persons might be thought to intimate and to justify a dislike of children, but the letters show conclusively that Jane did not dislike children as a class, and, besides, dislike never debarred its object from her novels.

Other renunciations, already touched, must be included in our summary. If Miss Austen could not be modern with the modernists, there seems no reason why she should not have been ethical with Miss Brontë or George Eliot, or religious with the upholders of Anglican piety in fiction. We have seen that she put sense in the place of ethics, and as to religion the taboo excluded not only the feelings, which are clearly not open to everybody, but even the social or public phenomena, the services, the obligations, everything pretty much except the clergymen, from whom, as she unerringly divined, the worldliness of the worldliest novel had nothing to dread.

Let us now summarize our summary. In the novels of Jane Austen there is no politics, no literary or æsthetic life, no supernaturalism (though this is not significant), no sex-radicalism, no class problems, almost no landscape, almost nothing of the *corpus* or physical order of life, no low-life portraits, scant

domesticity, no moral experience, no vestige of religious sentiment. I doubt if any such concourse of negatives, any such wealth of privations, can be attributed to any other novelist of superlative capacity. One asks in stupefaction: What is left? what did she find to paint? To which it might be concisely replied: She painted courtship in the upper middle class and minor gentry.

Like most condensations, this simplifies too much. Other topics find a place in Miss Austen. The cupidities of the Dashwoods, the servilities of Mr. Collins, the qualmishness of Mr. Woodhouse, the loquacity of Miss Bates, the coxcombry of Sir Walter Elliot, the nightmares of Catherine Morland, are not courtship, but they are all episodic or ancillary matters, admitted as small contributions, or indulged as passing interruptions, of narratives whose substance is courtship. Of the treatment of love I shall speak briefly in the sequel; for the rest it suffices for the moment to remark that success in fiction is not an appanage to range, and that Miss Austen's ownership of the two master faculties of humor and characterization at once lowers this want of compass into the class of secondary though far from negligible limitations.

One offset to this narrowness is found in a trait to the right perception and valuation of which I am inclined to think that a knowledge of the *Letters* is indispensable. The trait is powerful but tacit in

the novels; it is powerful and audible in the *Letters;* and it is only an ear that the *Letters* have trained to alertness that can recognize its full authority and virtue in the fictions. The trait might be called incisiveness or robustness, but, if allowed my choice, I should willingly name it downrightness, which, with forthrightness as its tool and uprightness as its support, makes the *Letters* interesting even when they are trivial and authoritative even when they are capricious. The reason why the effect is less instantly perceptible in the fictions must be sought in the veneer of abstraction with which the concrete substance of the novels is tiresomely overlaid. She was born to write books that should have closed with life in the hand-to-hand encounter of Turgénieff or Verga; but the fashion of her day favored combat at long range, and, in form at least, she was not rebellious to the fashion. Her nature, however, asserted itself even in its plasticities, and the reader felt the picture even through the curtain of abstraction, as a man divines the warmth of a friend's hand even through the glove in which the rigor of fashion obliges him to muffle it. The effect is seized in the vigor of the concrete strokes with which the rational and bodiless narrative is so sparsely punctuated.

In the *Letters*, however, the quality is revealed in its fulness. "He touched nothing that he did not adorn," was said of one writer; of Miss Austen in her letters it may be said that she touches nothing that

she does not indent. They are not written, but stamped; they remind us of the *Journal to Stella* and of the more varied, but in parts equally homely, letters of that other tersely pungent Jane, Mrs. Carlyle. There is a disinfectant, antiseptic quality in this downrightness which operates in several curative ways. If Jane Austen has delicacies, they are of a granular type healthily remote from that pastiness which often makes delicacy indelicate. If she sends affectionate messages, they are not the dribble or drivel which such things are prone to become on the pen of the womanly woman; her "Yours affectionately's," are not saccharine and her "God bless you's" are not unctuous. If she uses a pretentious phrase such as "her sister in Lucina," the smart blow of the little tackhammer with which she drives it in redeems it from all ineptitude. Her very affectations, which are very few, have the carriage of nature. What could be worse on general principles than phrases of this kind, both by an odd chance on the same page: "The Lances with whose cards we have been endowed"; and "whether she boasts any offspring besides a grand pianoforte"? Yet these things are—I will not say pleasant—but endurable in Jane Austen. Her robustness has a cathartic effect even on the gossip of which the supply in the letters is inexhaustible. It is a straightforward and unembarrassed gossip, of semi-masculine quality, written—I speak in symbolic terms—in a bold hand

without underscorings or interlineations. Lastly, I know no one more obedient or less servile to convention; in her conformities she appears to ratify quite as much as to submit.

This temperamental virtue by which the letters so signally profited was beneficial to the novels in two great points the treatment of which has been thus far scanted or postponed. They are humor and the portrayal of love—the two things which have extended Miss Austen's popularity. Miss Austen is an eminent novelist because of her truth; she is a popular novelist because she possessed a delectable humor and because she portrayed love with vigor and pertinacity. So far as the major public goes, the readers who like Miss Austen for her faithfulness to nature are the cousins or possibly the descendants of those paragons who read historical novels for the sake of the history. The enjoyment of truth is highly respectable, and if one has the luck to enjoy a truth-telling writer, the association of the two facts is irresistible to vanity. Everything is assigned to the credit of truth, because the reader is a partaker in that credit, and truth, I regret to say, is hypocrite enough to accept the praise for victories in which the real conqueror was personality or vigor. I am far from saying that there is not much realism both in Miss Austen's humor and in her love: but neither shows her truth in its purity; the admixture of burlesque in the one case, of convention in the other, was considerable.

I wish neither to delay nor qualify the willing avowal that I hold Miss Austen's humor in high esteem. It is less the viand than the service, less the ingenuity of the combination than the perfection of its delivery, that liberates and quickens admiration. The good jest is that which keeps its incognito best and longest, which belies and disowns itself—which, in a homelier figure, avoids leakage. Miss Austen's humor is water-tight, and the neatness of joinery which the adjective implies is one of its most winning characteristics. The virtue is largely in style and tone. I have a feeling—which is more, I hope, than a fancy—that the style is unusually good when its freightage is a joke. In such cases Miss Austen employs effectively what I shall venture to call her legal manner. I quote again the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice:* "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Does not one savor a "Be it known unto all men by these presents" in the modulation of that austerely pungent sentence?

Again, the tone of the humorous expression is all that one could ask. I will resist the temptation to say that it is the very best tone to be found in English humor; when a critic's mind is strongly on one object and faintly or vaguely on many others, the detection of superiorities is facile. Miss Austen's humor is not arch or sly or magnetic or exuberant,

and all these moods have their fascination. In Miss Austen the pointed merit is a cogency which is the ideal counterpart to what I have presumed to call the legalism of the style. Extracts, like other transplantations, are prone to be disappointing, but I shall draw what illustrative service I can from the following excerpt from *Pride and Prejudice.*

Elizabeth laughed heartily at this picture of herself, and said to Colonel Fitzwilliam, "Your cousin will give you a very pretty notion of me, and teach you not to believe a word I say. I am particularly unlucky in meeting with a person so well able to expose my real character, in a part of the world where I had hoped to pass myself off with some degree of credit. Indeed, Mr. Darcy, it is very ungenerous of you to mention all that you knew to my disadvantage in Hertfordshire—and, give me leave to say, very impolitic too—for it is provoking me to retaliate, and such things may come out as will shock your relations to hear."

"I am not afraid of you," said he, smilingly.

"Pray let me hear what you have to accuse him of," cried Colonel Fitzwilliam. "I should like to know how he behaves among strangers."

"You shall hear then—but prepare yourself for something very dreadful. The first time of my ever seeing him in Hertfordshire, you must know, was at a ball—and at this ball, what do you think he did? He danced only four dances. I am sorry to pain you—but so it was. He danced only four dances, though gentlemen were scarce; and, to my certain knowledge, more than one young lady was sitting down in want of a partner. Mr. Darcy, you cannot deny the fact."

"I had not at that time the honour of knowing any lady in the assembly beyond my own party."

"True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a ballroom."

The phrase, "I am sorry to pain you" as witticism is ordinary enough, but it is deftly placed and perfectly said, and its effect in the context is charming. The whole passage illustrates the salutary force of that positiveness, of that robust and affirmative property, of which the manifestations in Miss Austen's work are so variously happy.

Humor is commonly the result of the clash between two dissenting sets of values, and in Miss Austen's case the sources of dissent can be pointed out with definiteness, if not with completeness or rigor. The first and least important of the disparities is the opposition of the judicious and the freakish which I have already noted in the letter-writer, the imperiousness of the caprice finding its pointed contrast and eventual correction in the delayed but unqualified surrender to fact. What points the situation is the grave irony which makes the caprice almost as magisterial as the judgment. "I am very much obliged to Mrs. Knight for such a proof of the interest she takes in me, and she may depend upon it that I will marry Mr. Papillon, whatever be his reluctance or my own. I owe her much more than such a trifling sacrifice."

The second and more usual form of clash is illustrated in the following passage:

> The good news quickly spread through the house, and with proportionate speed through the neighborhood. It was borne in the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure, it would have

been more for the advantage of conversation had Miss Lydia Bennet come upon the town; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world, in some distant farm-house. But there was much to be talked of in marrying her; and the good-natured wishes for her well-doing which had proceeded before from all the spiteful old ladies in Meryton lost but little of their spirit in this change of circumstances, because with such a husband her misery was considered certain.

In Miss Austen's matter-of-fact world there was a curious paradox. It was a world that loved materialities, the beef and pudding in which long ago, perhaps unjustly, Lowell found the fulcrum with which to move John Bull, a world that was unashamed in its pursuit of houses and lands, dinners and lunches, livings and dowries, orchards and coach horses. Jane Austen was a willing part of this world, and her assent to its ideals was unperturbed and cordial. But this was not the end. The earth-world begets an air-world as its adjunct and envelope; prosperity results in that priceless boon and dreaded pest called leisure, and people fly from the vacuum of solitude to what harsher critics would describe as the equal vacuum of social intercourse. The implement of society is speech, and a new world, a world of communication, is formed, in which old values are whimsically modified and transposed; the particle is enlarged and the magnitude reduced, uncertainty becomes fact and prophecy fulfilment, calamities gratify and prosperities displease, life is re-edited, in short, to suit the call of

the occasion or the pleasure of the individual. We have no reason to doubt that Miss Austen accepted this secondary world with the same serenity and alacrity with which she lent herself to the solid universe of which it was the mocking shadow. She perceived its unreality, but she did not infer its unsoundness. She viewed it very much as she viewed the fruits on the ladies' hats in Bath. She had good eyes, and she knew perfectly well that the grapes and cherries of the feminine headgear were not edible grapes and cherries. But, so far as we know, it never occurred to her that they were not right because they were not real, or that they were less legitimate in their own way than the fruit which pleased the taste and fed the body. A real cherry on a hat would have been, not honest, but absurd. Now Miss Austen was a person who grasped things, and when a sham came in her way, she took hold of it with the admirable solidity and downrightness with which she grasped the actualities of life. That was where the fun arose. The relation between this thin world and this solid fashion of conceiving it was the relation between flax and hemp, between gauze and wire. An exhilarating contrast resulted from the expression of the fragile in terms of the massive.

Jane Austen saw through these shams, but perhaps her humor was brightened by the fact that, seeing through them, she did not see beyond them. In

other words, she saw no alternative. In the presence of a strong inner vision, poetical or mystical, the vision of a Shelley, a Blake, or even a Galsworthy, the social fabric would have undergone a shrinkage in the face of which the contrast between its assumptions and its realities would have lost all its weight and half its piquancy. But to Jane Austen society was roof and wall. She was social to the core, concreted with her kind, touching human beings on all sides, and touching little else but the corporeities and tangibilities of things. Somebody was always by; her room at Chawton and at Steventon was shared by her sister. It is doubtful if she read enough to command that virtual solitude of which the persevering reader is master or mistress. Her books were written in secret, but the shifts to which she resorted for the maintenance of this secrecy are proof of the degree to which her life was enveloped and permeated by the life of the household.

Outside of the home proper and the half-domesticity which she enjoyed in the establishments of her generous and hospitable brothers, loomed the wider social world which for Jane Austen seems to have been both the rim of experience and the boundary of imagination. Her letters are sanded with proper names; she is always meeting, testing, docketing, somebody. Society often bored and sometimes vexed her, but these misadventures apparently led her to question its finality as little as a bad hand

or a bad partner at whist arouses any doubt of the worth of the game in the mind of the tireless player. It is probable that Jane's respect for this order whose extremities and eccentricities she allowed herself to satirize was at bottom unshakable; and it was this esteem for the whole that gave point to her quarrel with the particulars. The last thing the tactful humorist should do is to call his victim insane; by so doing he normalizes every vagary. The absurd in the rational is comic because out of place; the absurd in the absurd is proper and pointless. In the same way a satire which arraigns society in the mass at once effaces contrast and levels expectation. To that extent it defeats its own purpose. Jane Austen's concessions to society were large enough to give piquancy to her refusals.

In the portrayal of love, the second of the two things which make Jane Austen a popular novelist, she profited vastly by that positive and downright quality which scattered its beneficence so liberally through her work. The peculiarity about Jane Austen's love is that it is a fact, a fact that stands squarely and sharply in front of you, blocking your path, a fact that you cannot elude or circumvent. I think this no bad way in which to approach the passion. Trollope's love is delicious, because he felt and painted its force without a vestige of sentimentality and with very little of that pleating and wimpling which we loosely designate as sentiment.

His women in love are delightful, because, while womanly to the core, they love almost like boys, not blustering or domineering boys, but kind and modest lads, frank even in shyness. Miss Austen's girls are less winning than Trollope's, because they are more consciously rational, but they share with the later novelist's heroines the half-nautical properties of trimness and balance. Her girls are always clear-headed, and their clearness as to the man they want is so peremptory as to conquer in the long run the opposition of parents and even the backwardness of the man himself. Sweet and docile as they often are, they show very little of that shy, reluctant, amorous delay which Milton, a stickler for the proprieties even in Paradise, ceremoniously ascribed to our first mother. Agitation, of course, is furnished in correct amounts at proper intervals, but this flutter of the spirits is almost as external to their characters as the flutter of their fans.

Courtship is omnipresent in the novels of Jane Austen. Racine is said to have found in love the counterpoise to the alarming dearth of interest in the French classical drama, and his characters make love with an ardor proportioned to the necessities of the dramatist. Ardor is not the precise word for Jane Austen's people, but they are equally alert in applying the same specific to a kindred malady. In *Pride and Prejudice* Miss Austen marries off three daughters in one family—no small accomplishment

even for a novelist whose competence in match-making is so formidable. Apart from this sisterly triad, Miss Lucas obtains Mr. Collins, and three or four other tentative inclinations are defeated or renounced. In *Emma* four women obtain husbands, not to mention other courtships, in which the issue was less successful without being less fortunate. In *Persuasion* Anne and the two Musgrove sisters are married, and even the objectionable Mrs. Clay is indulged with the prospect of a husband. *Sense and Sensibility* could hardly have been more amatory if its authoress had been Mrs. Jennings herself, and the allowance of love-making in *Mansfield Park* would satisfy a school-girl or a lady's maid.

In contrast with this engrossment with the theme is the unwillingness to engage with love in what might be described with almost literal accuracy as a hand-to-hand encounter. Miss Austen shirks or slights a declaration scene. She leads up to it, she circles round it, she recalls and supplements it; but, if possible, she eludes the crisis. The obvious exception is merely a formal exception. Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth is fully handled, because it is vital to the plot; moreover, the outcome is rejection and a quarrel, and Miss Austen is not called upon to portray tenderness. In Mr. Knightley's proposition to Emma, Miss Austen shares the discomfort of the suitor. Mr. Crawford is granted a little more freedom in the expression of his regard

for the unreciprocating Fanny. But Miss Austen has only silence or at best reserve for the explanations between Jane and Bingley, between Elinor and Edward Ferrars, between Marianne and Colonel Brandon, between Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney, between Edmund Bertram and Mary Crawford, between the same Edmund and Fanny Price, between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth, in spite of the elaboration of the scaffolding which in the last-named case hides the insignificance of the edifice. The devices to which Miss Austen will resort in the endeavor to avoid a grapple with this problem are sometimes comic in their awkwardness. What follows is the sequel to Darcy's second offer to Elizabeth.

> Elizabeth, feeling all the more than common awkwardness and anxiety of his situation, now forced herself to speak; and immediately, though not very fluently, gave him to understand that her sentiments had undergone so material a change since the period to which he alluded, as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure his present assurances. The happiness which this reply produced was such as he had probably never felt before, and he expressed himself on the occasion as sensibly and as warmly as a man violently in love can be supposed to do.

The mistress of a young ladies' boarding-school could not express herself with a less informing or more edifying vagueness. What would the author of these demure lines have said to a certain other woman who in a letter to her sister jested about a lord's having a mistress? There is another point in

the behavior of Miss Austen which a preceptress would have cordially indorsed. I do not at this moment recall a kiss given by a young man to a young woman in any novel of Jane Austen; and while this generalization would doubtless go down, as such fragile craft commonly do, in the storm and stress of a resolute induction, the quality to which it points is seaworthy enough to outride any tempest. I have already remarked that stage-business is missing in Miss Austen's scenes, and a ban so austere was clearly not to be relaxed in favor of kissing or fondling or other expedients by which writers of the febrile type have raised the temperature and lowered the morale of their productions. Miss Austen not only excludes the flesh, but, to a very great extent, its not less attractive and more innocent associate, the blood.

I thought at first that the formula, "force without warmth" might serve to differentiate the Jane Austen brand of love. This is on the whole too trenchant and succinct, though it would apply accurately enough to the passions of such couples as Darcy and Elizabeth, Emma and Mr. Knightley. They want each other earnestly no doubt, but they want each other as ambitious men want posts or covetous men want properties; they appeal to each other as sterling investments. All the considerations that lead Elizabeth to revise her estimate of Darcy are considerations that would have acted

with force on a parent or guardian impartially concerned for Elizabeth's happiness. They include, of course, the manners, brains, and morals which no enlightened parent or guardian would ignore. Elizabeth has looked over the man, as she looked over his grounds, and the appraisals in both cases have been reassuring.

Why, then, do I hesitate to accept the formula, "force without warmth," as the adequate diagnosis of the passion? I hesitate, because I seem to detect in the shy passions of Fanny Price and Anne Elliot a hearth that, in Herrick's beautiful phrase, smiles to itself, and spreads a faint but gracious warmth in its vicinity. But Fanny Price and Anne Elliot are tender things, who live in a chilly world, to whom a little warmth is allowed on the same principle that a fire might be permitted to an invalid even in the household of an austere New Englander. Miss Austen is more herself in other portraits. The case of Marianne Dashwood is significant in three aspects. First of all, the drawing power, what I am tempted to call, by too violent a figure, the tug or haul of the passion, is strongly caught; second, the warmth is hardly felt, though Marianne's temperament is distinctively warm; third, the inner detail is entirely omitted. Speaking broadly, that part of the psychology of the passion on which Miss Austen instinctively dwells is the half-satirical part, the marking of its bounds and the exposure of its inconsistencies.

When Emma, who had been angry with Mr. Knightley for his supposed intention to disinherit his young nephew by marrying Harriet Smith, marries him herself in total indifference to the equal peril to this young nephew's cherished prospects, we feel that this is not only shrewd and right, but eminently characteristic of the author. Equally happy is the genial malice in her report of the change in the attitude of Mr. Knightley toward Frank Churchill with the increase of his awareness of Emma's unconcern for that person.

> He had found her agitated and low. Frank Churchill was a villain. He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate. She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow.

That is what I mean by force without warmth. Of course force and warmth could not be separated in the actual Mr. Knightley; they are simply discriminated in the portrayal.

Literature has two fashions of viewing love. The first regards love as a motor or dynamo; it starts the narrative, and keeps it moving. In this regard its value is unlimited, but as long as it propels the car, an inquiry into the detail of its mechanism is useless, if not hurtful. The immortal instance is the elopement of Helen and Paris and its calamitous sequel in ten years of heroic and profitless conflict between

Europe and Asia. We know that the thankless and disdainful Homer vouchsafes only a casual word or two to the content or aspect of a passion to which he owed the glory of an Iliad. The second fashion of treatment views love, not as the mere incentive or starting-point of the exhibition, but as, in large part at least, the exhibition itself. A colossal—almost a portentous—instance is found in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*, in which the symptomatic treatment, the treatment by particularization of symptoms, is carried to a point which breeds rebellion in those who can read *Romeo and Juliet* with joy, and D'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco* with fortitude.

Between these two forms of approach Miss Austen chooses a diagonal. Love on the amorous side, its warmth, its intimacy, its poetry, its color, she rejects with quiet decision. Psychology of a kind she does paint, but I trust I shall not fall into Venetian supersubtlety if I suggest that what she gave was less the psychology of love as such than the psychology of human nature as affected by the perturbations and instabilities for which that unsettling passion is responsible. Half her pleasure in love grew out of the new scope it offered to the perceptive and judicial faculties in the exercise of which her interest was unquenchable. Love was a fresh call to judgment, a new spur to criticism. Jane Austen, again, felt a keen interest in the vibrations and palpitations, the concords and discords, the cleavages and solderings,

which betrothals induce in the environment of the lovers. She was precise in her drawing of the secondary or derivative traits of love, and her sense of its limitations was realistically keen; the primary traits alone were left in the cautious twilight of conventional assumptions. When Jane Austen's lovers meet, the gas is turned low.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

JANE AUSTEN'S nature was vigorous and downright; her method was largely formal and abstract: the effort of the method to smother the nature and the craft of the nature in circumventing the method are points of analytic and dramatic interest in a survey of her work. In some respects I think she was unfortunately posted in the alignment of the forces of English literature in the vast terrain of the centuries. For the eighteenth-century pomp and circumstance which she so strongly exhibited, it was a little too late; for her nineteenth-century realism, it was a little too early. Recognition in the sequel was secure, but the recognition of posterity neither sustains nor encourages. By her backwardness in form and by her forwardness in substance she was equally divided from the great romantic movement which irradiated and transformed the literature of her day. In one point indeed its example might have been liberating; it might have prompted the transference to her novels of the concrete and pictorial diction which became her instinctive vehicle in the undress of the *Letters*. But in this point her luck in time was counterpoised

by her mischance in place; that beer-brewing and ham-curing, that hat-trimming and shirt-making, that card-playing and Bath-visiting, society in which she lived moved too slowly to find in Jane Austen the youthful plasticity which would have leaped to welcome the renovating touch. I think her novels had one solitary point of resemblance to the prose fictions of her great contemporary and antitype, Walter Scott; the form in both was a quarter or half century behind the matter—if in Miss Austen's case we should not rather say a century behind.

Even in the point of matter I think that Miss Austen suffered from the intellectual and artistic poverty of her environment. Her associates had good minds no doubt, and they were just sufficiently well read to escape the charge of want of reading. But they could supply little to a novelist except a theme, and several traits in Jane Austen which might have flourished under culture were doomed to meagre sustenance and scant thrift in that ungenerous soil. One of these was feeling for landscape; another was interest in what might be broadly called the body and apparel of life. A third was psychology, in which Miss Austen's success, though considerable and praiseworthy, was far from commensurate with the scope of her faculty. A fourth was reflection on life; few people who have generalized so keenly have generalized so little. No wise critic will amplify these negations. In all cases of large achievement

regret for shortcomings is as ignorant as it is thankless and sterile. Limitations have their unguessed benefits; the fence that keeps one good thing out may keep another good thing in. I am not sure that one great reason for Jane Austen's success was not that in the tightness of her enclosure she was not bothered by stimuli nor pestered with encouragements.

I am fortified in this resignation by a feeling that Jane Austen did her work with the minimum of fuss and self-consciousness. Literature as a whole is probably more instinctive than the deference of the layman imagines. There are authors who plan undoubtedly, but one suspects that this comes about less because they plan to plan than because they have an inborn appetite for planning. One may further suspect, if one likes, that, even when pains are lavished upon the work, the author is generous in one quarter and parsimonious in another in a fashion regulated rather by his own taste than the needs and deserts of the topic in question; otherwise it is hard to explain the absence of perfection, and even of any evenness or symmetry in the approach to perfection, on the part of works that bear the fingermarks of study. Let the principle be sound or not; our present concern is its bearing on Jane Austen. Byron woke one morning, and found himself famous; Jane may similarly have awakened some morning, and found that she had written a book. If I said that her

material slid through her into her book, I might be accused of rhetoric. Let me say in less questionable terms that she saw things in life which she thought it would be amusing to set down, and she set them down—the earliest, simplest, and most auspicious origin of books. I doubt if she cared much to aid the world. True, her novels have lessons; in those didactic times she would no more have sent a novel into the world unprovided with a lesson than destitute of a binding. Both lessons and bindings have their use; they hold loose sheets together. I do not mean that she was insincere in her lesson any more than I mean that she was indifferent to her binding, but it is unlikely that either constituted her incentive to write. On one occasion she names those incentives. They include praise, and what she calls pewter (money), but she is shamelessly silent as to the satisfactions to be derived from the practice of leechcraft on an ailing race.

I doubt if she felt a moral responsibility in relation to the truth of her works. She would not have written truth with a capital letter; she would have feared that the next step might be to spell it "ew" with the oleaginous Mr. Chadband, whose acquaintance she did not live to make. I think she portrayed truth, when she did portray truth, because she liked it—*really* liked it—without theory and without conscience, and I think this independence and unconcern in combination with real attachment

is part of her strength. It may be virtuous to speak truth, because it is holy or useful; but it is safe and fortunate to follow it because it is interesting. It is perhaps a slight defect in the otherwise unexceptionable attitude of our own excellent Mr. Howells that he affects us as having stood up in church with truth, and uttered the promise to hold, love and cherish with appropriate solemnity. After that, it is all a matter of course. Who minds a man's attentions to his wife? With Jane the affair has all the interest of courtship. Let truth be on his guard. If fiction should turn out to be the sprightlier fellow of the two? It is good to be natural in one's love of nature. I do not know whether Jane was unconscious or unscrupulous in the modifications of truth which she unquestionably tolerated. Her surrenders to convention were large, and we have already seen that in her comic portrayals, far from copying that slatternly housewife Nature in the dinginess of her kitchenware, she scoured the truth until it fairly shone.

Jane Austen, it seems to me, was genuine, not superficially nor fussily nor delicately nor conscientiously nor heroically genuine, but genuine in a large, basic, temperamental way that winked at little lies and tiny poses, that could give way to manners, to decency, for aught I know, to interest, but which in the absence of deflectors instinctively and strongly preferred the fun of uttering its own

sensations to the credit of voicing other people's. She enjoyed her own mind; she took herself cheerfully like other dispensations of Providence. She did not care to say what she did not feel, and she refused to do so unless the need were peremptory. She had neither presumption nor diffidence—the vices of self-consciousness. She had gauged her own capacities with singular exactness, and, by a pleasing paradox, a wise self-distrust kept her within the limits within which she could maintain a reasonable self-confidence. Her conformity and her self-reliance are both interestingly shown in her correspondence with the royal librarian, Mr. J. S. Clarke. She would dedicate *Emma* to the Prince Regent, if that potentate chose to have it so, but she writes a letter to his librarian in which the literary advice of that slightly presumptuous gentleman is civilly but summarily rejected.

To understand Jane Austen, we must remember that she had both a strong and a docile mind. The adjustment of these traits to each other was easier than it might have been in a more thoughtful environment or a later century. Agreement between the strength and the docility was more usual than difference, and where difference occurred, there was apparently no conflict. Sometimes the strength overcame or quietly set aside the docility, sometimes the docility was too much for the strength; and Jane Austen was no more humiliated by the second

outcome than she was inflated by the first. Jane was conventional in the old fashion, the better fashion which prevailed before conventionality was discovered, and the word had had time to define and defile the idea. There can be no doubt that her conformities are sometimes harmful to her work. Jane Austen was no precisian or pulpiteer, but a precisian or pulpiteer might have adopted her work as his model. I do not think that she was self-conscious, but I think that almost all her characters speak self-consciously. Miss Austen wrote majestically for the same reason that she wrote in English. She felt that she could no more act on her undoubted preference for homely directness than she could have acted on an abstract preference for French. She donned the manner as her father and brother donned the surplice for the conduct of morning worship, or as she and the English world, if her presages were verified, put on mourning for the Duke of Gloucester. A sharp distinction must be drawn between submission to general usage and that aping of a particular usage, neither natural to ourselves nor binding on the world, which we justly stigmatize as affectation. When people wore mourning for the Duke of Gloucester, nobody was sincere and nobody was affected; when everybody pretends, everybody confesses and nobody pretends.

The fate of Jane Austen in this particular was, I suspect, the fate of George Crabbe, who, though at

heart a plainspoken, straightforward fellow, had the eighteenth century on his back, and never taught his mere manner to straighten up from its bending posture to the natural and manly perpendicular. The eighteenth century was a self-conscious century, and a modest person brought up under its tutelage avoided personal self-consciousness by fleeing to the shelter of a self-consciousness so general and so binding as to deaden its own quality. In such an age one dared not be simple for fear of affectation. Jane's attitude in all this was absolutely unheroic. Souls of harder edge whose mission was to liberate and inspire the world would have followed their own impulses to all lengths at all costs. But there is room for variety of type on a tolerant and hospitable planet. Jane Austen's business was not to liberate or inspire the world, and these archangels in their empyreal preoccupations have found no time to leave us *Northanger Abbeys* or *Mansfield Parks*.

I have uttered the word "inspire," and I take up the implicit challenge of that word. What was the scope of Jane Austen's commerce with life? Were there depths and secrecies in her experience which left no mark on the sunny reaches of her tranquil and equable novels, no shadow on the current of her racy and provocative correspondence? To this query the reply is doubtful. We cannot co-ordinate experience with utterance until we have measured

the limits of reserve, and reserve is silent as to its own limits. That Jane Austen may have felt things which she could not impart to that singular combination of intimate and stranger which we call a relative is believable enough. It is somewhat harder to believe that she felt things which it was impossible to impart to that combination of intimate and stranger on very different lines which we call a reader. If Jane Austen struggled and aspired, she wrote six novels without introducing a character who struggled and aspired, and I am not sure that this reticence is human. It is safer to assume that morality and religion made upon Miss Austen certain claims as definitive and as imperative as the butcher's and grocer's bills, and that they were as readily placated and as effectually put aside by the liquidation of these claims as the butcher and grocer by the application of pounds, shillings, and pence. That what may be called the wryness of things made itself known to her in some form or other it is impossible to doubt. A woman as keen as Jane Austen does not live to forty years without finding much to pardon, or not to pardon, in this churlish and inconsequential world. There is no reason to believe that her stoutness was not equal to all tests, or that she was warped or embittered by the stringencies that find their ruthless way into the most firmly fenced and snugly bolted lives. She was a censor, but no cynic. Cynicism is the revenge we take upon a

disobliging cosmos for its failure to come up to expectations. It is highly probable that the strong sense which is demonstrable and the absence of idealism which is presumable in Jane Austen reduced expectations to a level with which reality could rationally cope. She is not the sweet Jane Austen of complacent legend, but a Jane more to my taste, a plain, frank, keen-sighted Englishwoman, with an inspiriting wilfulness that had its bound and check in a touching docility, with an incisiveness finally and securely, though not immediately or showily, subject to benevolence, and with a friendly acceptance of limited surroundings of which the literature she gave to a grateful country was at once the expression, the result, and the reward.

APPENDIX

REFERENCES

I believe in full and precise references, but have a strong distaste for the intrusiveness of such material where it interrupts the text or litters the margin. The best escape from two evils is to give a reference to every important quotation or allusion in the text in a final appendix under the appropriate page-number. Suppose, for instance, a reader wishes to verify the passage beginning "There were very few beauties" on page 199. On page 199 he will find no note and no indication of a note. But all he has to do is to turn to the appendix where the notes are grouped in the numerical order of the pages, and find 199, opposite which the phrase will be found in connection with the desired reference, "Brabourne, I, 242–243."

References to the novels are made by book and chapter; further detail, in the diversity of editions, seemed impracticable.

Memoir, in these references, means the *Memoir of Jane Austen* by her nephew, the Rev. J. E. Austen Leigh (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1892). *Lady Susan* and the *Watsons* are published in the same volume, and, sometimes at least, stand first in the title.

Life means *Jane Austen; her Life and Letters*, by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, grandnephew and great-grandnephew of Jane Austen (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1913).

Brabourne means *Letters of Jane Austen*, edited by Edward, Lord Brabourne, another grandnephew (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1884).

Goldwin Smith means *Life of Jane Austen*, by Goldwin Smith (London: W. Scott, 1890, in the *Great Writers* series.)

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189. "I am ashamed to say," *Life*, xx, 385.
189. "My mother has borne," *Life*, xx, 385.
189. "There were two pools at commerce," *Brabourne*, ii, 12.
189. "I have this moment received," *Brabourne*, ii, 249.

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190. "Mrs. Deedes is as welcome as May," *Brabourne*, ii, 293.
190. "I am a gentleman's daughter," *Pride and Prejudice*, lvi.
191. "The Viscountess Dalrymple," *Persuasion*, xvi.
192. "What weather," *Life*, xvi, 289.
194. "That she gave me no pleasure," *Life*, xvi, 296.
194. "I liked her," *Brabourne*, ii, 210.
194. "Dear Dr. Johnson," *Brabourne*, i, 328.
194. "Marriage with George Crabbe," *Brabourne*, ii, 193.
195. "Cowper's 'Tirocinium'," *Tirocinium*, 562 (*Mansfield Park*, xlv).
195. "Syringa ivory pure," Cowper, Task, *Winter Walk at Noon*, 149–150 (*Life*, xii, 199–200).
195. "Ought I to be very much pleased with 'Marmion'?" *Brabourne*, i, 356.
195. "Going to send Marmion," *Brabourne*, ii, 58.
195. "Walter Scott has no business," *Brabourne*, ii, 317.
196. "No novels really but Miss Edgeworth's," *Brabourne*, ii, 318.
196. "Sir Charles Grandison," *Memoir*, v.
196. "Remember that Aunt Cassandras," *Brabourne*, ii, 66.
196. "Corinna," *Brabourne*, ii, 50.
196. "Goldsmith, Hume, and Robertson," *Memoir*, v.
196. "Modern Europe," *Brabourne*, ii, 166.
197. "Roots of heart's ease," *Brabourne*, i, 231.
198. "Lyme," *Persuasion*, xi.
199. "There were very few beauties," *Brabourne*, i, 242–243.
200. "Mrs. W. K. is just dead," *Brabourne*, i, 325.
200. "A gentleman in a buggy," *Brabourne*, i, 208.
200. "My aunt has a very bad cough," *Brabourne*, i, 293.
200. "A better account of the sugar," *Brabourne*, ii, 256.
201. "Sweet, amiable Frank," *Brabourne*, ii, 257.
203. "Eliza has seen Lord Craven," *Brabourne*, i, 258–259.
204. "He is quite an M. P.," *Brabourne*, ii, 186.
205. "Mr. Brecknell is very religious," *Brabourne*, ii, 99.
214. "Elizabeth laughed heartily," *Pride and Prejudice*, xxxi.
216. "I am very much obliged," *Brabourne*, ii, 40–41.

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216. "The good news," *Pride and Prejudice*, l.

223. "Elizabeth, feeling all the more," *Pride and Prejudice*, lviii.

226. "He had found her," *Emma*, xlix.

Correction.—The author withdraws the following statement on page 191: "The impassive formula, *To the Prince Regent*, shows no cleavage in her impenetrable reserve." The facts do not, in any conclusive or decisive way, support this statement.

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